DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 111 370   IR 002 424

AUTHOR   Boles, Suzanne
TITLE   A Conceptual Framework for Program Planning and
              Evaluation Within Public Libraries.
PUB DATE   Jul 75
NOTE   10p.; Paper presented at the American Library
              Association Annual Conference (94th, San Francisco,
              California, June 29 through July 5, 1975)

EDRS PRICE   MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS   Conference Reports; *Evaluation Criteria; *Library
              Programs; Library Services; Objectives; *Performance
              Specifications; Program Planning; *Public
              Libraries
IDENTIFIERS   ALA 75

ABSTRACT
        In public library program planning, emphasis should
be placed on the linkage of measurement to evaluation. Three basic
assumptions underlie program planning and evaluation: (1) a basic
committment must be made to develop goals and objectives, (2)
measurement must be taken in regard to specific criteria, (3) a final
evaluation must be implemented. Performance or program targets
provide a comparison between what is intended and what is achieved
and the data obtained must be used to alert management to differences
in staff philosophies and to determine if the service is effective.
(Author/DS)

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR
PROGRAM PLANNING AND EVALUATION
WITHIN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

This paper examines the process of program planning and evaluation
and its inter-relationship to performance measures, with emph...is on the
linkage of measurement to evaluation. It is a conceptual framework for
program planning and evaluation within the real world of public libraries.

Program planning and evaluation is a process which requires policy
makers "to jointly identify...common goals, define each individual's major
area of responsibility in terms of results expected, and use these
'measures' for operating the library and assessing the contributions of
each of its members."[1] It "serves as a systematic process for determining
organizational direction and evaluating results through the identification,
clarification, and communication of mutually accepted and carefully defined
goals and objectives throughout the library."[2]

It is important to begin by describing the process and defining the
terms used to denote the various phases of the process. The basis of
planning is an understanding of the grand design -- a statement of the
values held by the institution. The first element in planning is identi-
.fication of a need. What situation requires attention? Is there a
problem or issue that requires a new approach? What evidence exists
that the situation or problem is actual and significant? What one
intends to accomplish is the goal; to what end will action be directed?
The objective, which is the guide for action, describes in specific terms
what needs to happen to fulfill the intentions. How the objective is reached

1

2

should be determined by identifying possible ways of meeting the need, then arriving at a decision of the most feasible alternative. An action plan becomes the next element; who will do what, when, and with what resources or help? The last element of planning begins the transition to evaluation. At this point consideration must be given to how one is to know if the various actions were taken and if they were effective. What results are important? How will these results be determined? The specifications of these outcomes are performance or program targets. They provide a focus for measurement of expectations against actual results— a focus which highlights the most significant areas of the phenomenon under consideration. Performance or program targets can be both qualitative and quantitative, dependant upon the aspect of the program being measured. Criteria for evaluation, methods and procedures for data collection and the questions asked comprise the dimensions of measures used to find whether the targets are being reached. It is the linking of "performance measures" and their analysis to the performance targets that is imperative if evaluation is to take place. This is the crucial task.

The Program Planning and Evaluation Process

There are three basic assumptions which underlie program planning and evaluation. First, participants in the process must "have a basic commitment" to develop "service goals and objectives which will meet some of the unfulfilled needs of the people."[3] Otherwise, planning is no more than a symbolic gesture; the planning document, not the achievement of goals, becomes the "final arbiter."[4]

Second, any "assessment of performance is linked with declared

objectives."[5] The consequences of decisions made in the PP&E process must be measured against specific criteria. How is it known if an appropriate level of performance has been reached? How is it known if success, even progress toward the objectives, has been achieved?

The third assumption is that the purpose of evaluation is to provide facts to assist decision makers determine if goals and objectives are being met. Can they insure the value of the service to the public or is there a discrepancy between intentions and outcomes of the service? It is essential for facts to be forthcoming throughout the process in order that the service can be improved or modified, if necessary, on a continuous basis. A final evaluation document is important, but not so important as the people who may have been poorly served during its preparation.

In setting goals and objectives and steps necessary to implement them, planners must be competent and willing to determine the variety of goals which will influence the process. Openness about all the goals is demanded if later confusion or problems are to be lessened. Administrators may have a set of goals which may or may not be identical with those of the institution. Planners may want to further the possibility of job advancement or security by participating. Recipients of the service may have needs incompatible with what the institution thinks it should meet. To assume that the goals determined by the planners, who are already convinced of the need for the service, are the only ones in existence or will be readily accepted by all, can only lead to confusion and resistance when changes or modifications are required in the service.

Just as goals must be openly understood and attainable, objectives

should be specific statements derived from the goal, measureable by some criteria. Unmeasured conclusions and unsupported recommendations will not aid decision-making. It is specification of these objectives which becomes the means to evaluation. The "details of the service and the object of the service, the user population," must be known before appropriate criteria can be determined.[5] Key questions can be drawn from the hoped-for results. These questions form the basis for comparing intention against performance.

The Relationship of Performance Measures to PP&E

Performance measures, or measured outputs have the significant role of substantiating intuitive feelings about a service or program of an institution. They can offer concrete data to articulate perceptions about results of the service. Measurement is a primary tool for ordering a process by which we gain understanding of the commonality of various elements with greater precision and discrimination. Just because the measures may be quantifiable does not eliminate interpretation of the value of the thing being measured. In fact, when measuring the worth of a service to a user, numbers must act as means to an end. If questions to users are in a fashion requiring them to state an opinion or feeling about a service, there still must be enough of these opinions--numbers again--to give an adequate evaluation of the service. How one determines whether an aspect of public library service is measureable in the first place depends, of course, on how that service is viewed by those involved.

Foundations for arriving at performance measures are found in the evaluative criteria dealt with throughout the PP&E process--examination of

program alternatives, selection of the most feasible course, determination
of action steps and setting performance and program targets. Let's
explore these evaluative criteria.

Probing of alternatives for accomplishment of the objectives of the
service is a difficult and often frustrating job. One revolves between
non-reality and real-world constraints, between dream-world courses of
action and limited resources. In a group of people, a variety of ideas
and differences among what each views as possible can emerge. But in
setting forth specific ways to proceed, one is examining the criteria of
the potential service and judging the value of each alternative. Once
non-reality and reality merge and the most feasible way to proceed is
realized, the series of steps which focus on who does what, when, needs
to be formulated. Each step is a basis for evaluation--to determine what
is being done, and if it is not, why not.

A logical extension of these criteria is the setting of performance
or program targets, to have something discrete by which to measure what
you hope to achieve. As stated earlier, they provide a focus for comparison
between what is intended and what is achieved. They lead to the estimation
of key result areas or outcomes of the service.

Measurement to Evaluation

One now arrives at determination of the measurement criteria or
performance data. What do you need to know from whom, by when, by what
kinds of forms or interviews or other research methods. Performance measure-
ment is the process of getting what you need to know. If the quality of a
service is to be adequately and honestly judged, the measurement process

5

6

must occur. This is where one comes full force against the "real world."
Cries of "Where's the service?" come forth from staff when emphasis is
necessarily placed on training non-researchers, the librarians who work
directly with the patrons, to create the forms and gather the information.
But if a library is committed to the concept that research from the "inside",
e.g., by staff rather than researchers unaffiliated with the institution,
can be viewed objectively and can be more influencial with those who have
the responsibility for making decisions, the time required and the concen-
tration on helping the practicing librarian understand the reasons for and
techniques of data collection must be accepted. It must be remembered and
stated, over and over, that the point of measurement is to determine the
quality of the performance of a service.

To discover to what degree of effectiveness a service is being per-
formed, e.g., to what degree it is meeting the needs of people, those
providing the service and those receiving it must be questioned. If this
information is collected at only a few points, by a few committed individuals,
the task is easier than when a large number of people are involved; easier,
but not as valuable to the institution in the long run. But, no matter how
large the group that collects the information, "people-problems" enter in.
The public, who increasingly demand proof of the effectiveness of services
may also be the recipients of the service. Their voluntary cooperation is
needed in its evaluation. Yet, many citizens resists the intrusion of
surveys and questionnaires upon their privacy. Librarians, in many cases,
are even less willing to ask the necessary questions. It may be assumed
that librarians, who work with data every day would be comfortable collecting

it. But human factors provide inconsistency to this assumption. "Because I resist being questioned, I assume everyone else does." "It forces me to assume a more personal role with the patron which is uncomfortable for me." Or the opposite, "Keeping records on the services gets in the way of providing the service on a personal level."

It can be said that understanding the reasons and techniques of data collection and involvement at ground level of all staff will prevent resistance to it. It is imperative that planners constantly strive for this understanding. It is also necessary, however, that planners be cognizant of different value systems held, or time factors, or changes in personnel which any research in an action setting entails. Additionally, planners must realize the politics at play between different levels of data collection. For example, is the person responsible for overseeing measurement of a service also in charge of the budget for the departments in which the original data is collected?

The data obtained for the purpose of measuring performance must be used. Data collection and continuous analysis of it to show what is actually happening provide the information with which management, or other decision makers, can evaluate the service. In addition, if the data has been dealt with honestly throughout the collection points, one may find that what one thought was happening isn't at all. Thus, information needed to improve the service from an organizational viewpoint is available. The data may alert management to differences in staff philosophies and value systems which effect the kind of data collected or the way in which it is collected, and by extension, the kind of service being provided.

In essence, the people, politics, and value systems all contribute to any honest appraisal of measures of performance. Setting a target, however arbitrary, and assessing the degree to which it has been achieved demands an unavoidable "discussion of possible changes to correct deficiencies in the program."[7] Evaluation is the logical extension of performance measurement and can demand continuous changes, small or large. Joseph Wholey states that the "primary evaluation pay-off (in terms of decisions actually influenced) may be in evaluation that is done in enough detail to get at the effects of operational changes within operating programs."[8] This assumes that management decision makers really want to know what works best to provide the best service for the patron. Within this need to know, performance measures provide useful criteria for the evaluation of real outcomes--is the service meeting a need? Additionally, they provide guidelines for a re-examination of the needs of patrons. This examination leads to new understanding of the desirability of the goals and objectives and makes one accutely aware of the chances of meeting them.

FOOTNOTES

1. DeProspo, Ernest R., _A Program Planning and Evaluation Training Manual_, College Entrance Examination Board, New York, 1973, p. 12.

2. Ibid, p. 15.

3. Ibid, p. 2.

4. Wildavsky, Aaron, "If Planning is Everything, Maybe It's Nothing", _Policy Sciences_, Vol. 4, 1973, p. 129.

5. Mascarenhas, R. C., "A Systems View of the Measurement of the Performance of Public Enterprises in India", _Policy Sciences_, Vol. 5, 1974, p. 29.

6. DeProspo, E., _A Preliminary Draft of Evaluation Design and Data System Manual_, July, 1974, p. 15.

7. Suchman, Edward A., _Evaluative Research_, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1967, p. 162.

8. Wholey, Joseph S., "What Can We Actually Get From Program Evaluation", _Policy Sciences_, Vol. 3, 1972, p. 365.