



EVALUATING
Social Change

Vanguard Communications

2121 K Street, NW, Suite 650

Washington, DC 20037

202.331.4323

www.vancomm.com

Join the conversation:

@vancomm #PLPR

[Facebook.com/vancomm](https://www.facebook.com/vancomm)

[Pinterest.com/vancomm](https://www.pinterest.com/vancomm)

+vanguard communications



Evaluating Social Change

A **Purple Paper**™ from
Vanguard Communications

“The only man who behaved sensibly was my tailor; he took my measurement anew every time he saw me, while all the rest went on with their old measurements and expected them to fit me.”

— George Bernard Shaw



Innovation. Passion. Integrity. Quality.

About Vanguard

Innovation. Passion. Integrity. Quality. These core values drive the talented staff of Vanguard Communications, an award-winning, Hispanic woman-owned public relations and social marketing firm that focuses exclusively on communicating for social change.

Vanguard specializes in communication initiatives that educate the public, change perceptions and behavior, affect public policy, and ultimately protect the health and well-being of all of our neighbors. Our approaches are research-based, collaborative and culturally inclusive. Since 1987, Vanguard has made change happen for some of the nation's leading nonprofits, foundations and government agencies working in critical issue areas, such as mental health, energy and environment, health and wellness, youth and families, food and agriculture, and education.

Join our social change conversation on Twitter (@vancomm), Facebook (www.facebook.com/vancomm) and Pinterest (www.pinterest.com/vancomm), and on our InSites blog (www.vancomm.com/insites).

Why purple?

At Vanguard, we are passionate about righting wrongs, fighting injustice and achieving social change. We're also pretty fond of ... purple. As we set out to help broaden the knowledge of fellow communicators who are working toward the same societal goals, we knew that we had to package this advice with our special brand of purple passion. Our **Purple Paper™** isn't intended to be an in-depth report or a compendium of research. **Purple Papers** are a simple tool for sharing knowledge, seeding innovation and empowering change makers.

This series, planned as an annual release, will explore common communications challenges and offer accessible, user-friendly solutions. We know that those who share our commitment to social change often take on campaigns with few tools, direction and minuscule budgets. We also know that not all communication occurs in the form of a campaign. Efforts, promotions, initiatives and programs can also be evaluated, but we use the context of a campaign throughout the **Purple Paper** just to stay consistent. We know you'll apply the advice to whatever you're doing.

You have as many ideas and answers as we do, and over the next 365 days or so, we're going to keep the conversation going through our communication vehicles. Talk about your challenges and solutions on Twitter (@vancomm #plpr). With the power of knowledge on our side, we can all communicate for a better world.



Acknowledgments

Engaging communities is a core tenet of social marketing and one that we embrace in all of our work at Vanguard. In developing the first in our **Purple Paper™** series, *Evaluating Social Change*, our writing team — comprised of Brenda Foster, M.P.A., Brandi Horton and LeAnne DeFrancesco — collaborated with John Wedeles, M.P.H., a doctoral student in the Department of Prevention and Community Health at The George Washington University.

We look forward to continuing to partner with communicators in the field and others working to better our communities through social change.

Citing This Paper

At Vanguard, we're really good at sharing, and hope the combination of facts and fun in this paper will compel you to share as well. If you choose to cite us, please use the following attribution:

Foster, B., Horton, B., DeFrancesco, L., & Wedeles, J. (2012). *Evaluating Social Change*. Vanguard Communications **Purple Paper™**.

Contents

<i>What have you done for me lately?</i>	1
Why Evaluate?	2
Evaluation—The Starting Point	5
Goals and Objectives	5
The Stages of Change	7
Logic Models	8
Evaluation Applied	13
Formative Evaluation	13
Summative Evaluation	17
Process Evaluation	17
Outcome Evaluation	19
Impact Evaluation	20
Cost-Benefit and Cost-Effectiveness Analysis	21
Putting It All Together: The Evaluation Plan	22
<i>Some parting advice</i>	23
References	24



WHAT have you done for me LATELY?

It's what cause communicators hear all the time. Though we hope that our creativity and boundless dedication to social issues will be enough to impress Boards, members, funders and donors, it rarely is. Each time we spend money trying to change the world through communications, we're asked whether it's working.

Some people are never satisfied.

Communicators often see measuring social change as icing on an already tasty cake. Most of us try to figure out how many strategies we can fit into our increasingly shrinking budgets. If, and only if, there's a tiny bit left over do we concede to set it aside for — ugh! — evaluation.

The approach seems reasonable. After all, we're already at a disadvantage as we compete with corporate public relations resources for attention to our issues. The folly of that argument is that once our tiny funding pool is gone, it's gone. If we use it unwisely, without proof that it might work and evidence that it did, there's rarely a chance for a reboot.

It's true that this word — evaluation — which feels like it has just four letters, gives credence to our work, particularly when it comes to campaigns. It can be our best advocate when determining a campaign's audiences, messages and strategies — particularly those strategies that cost money.

So if you're the kind of communicator who spends endless amounts of creativity and energy trying to craft and re-craft the perfect campaign for social change, this **Purple Paper™** is for you. If you keep investing resources in “proven” communication approaches that never seem to take off, this **Purple Paper** is also for you. And if you have to regularly prove success to a higher organizational power, i.e., funding source, this **Purple Paper** is **REALLY** for you.

Evaluating Social Change includes a mix of theoretical, practical and applicable advice about, well, evaluating social change. If you're easily bored, start by reading the fun purple sidebars. The lessons and ideas will inspire you to investigate some of the lengthier paragraphs.



Don't treat the **Purple Paper** like a textbook. We've divided it into short sections that provide information you need as you need to know it. Bring it to a brainstorming to keep your ideas within the realm of possibility. Pass out a section at your next planning session to help create a strategy that blends evaluation into the layers of your delicious communications cake.

Finally, look at this **Purple Paper** as an opportunity to elevate your standing among those researchy, science-focused peers who design the programs you promote. Yes, communications is a fun profession, but it is also research-based and necessary to achieving social change. When we approach our work with an eye toward measurable results, we are proving that communications is serious and worthy of attention — and of course, robust support.



Why Evaluate?

Well, first, because **you can't celebrate success until you know that you've, in fact, had success.** And second, because you can't learn from the experience of what didn't work so well until you **KNOW** what didn't work so well. Evaluation informs best practices.

Look inside the word evaluation to find its purpose: determining the “value” of things. A textbook would (and has, actually) describe it as the process which identifies relevant values or standards that apply to what is being evaluated, performs empirical investigation using techniques from the social sciences and then integrates conclusions with the standards into an overall evaluation or set of evaluations (Scriven, 1991).

Uh, OK.

How about this? **Evaluation is a way to measure stuff — in this case, communications stuff.**

Essentially, we decide what we want to achieve with communications, then gather evidence to prove that the way we want to achieve it **MIGHT** work. Then we try it. Then we prove whether it did or didn't work. Simple? Good.

When results are positive, evaluation gives you standing with members, sponsors and others who contributed resources to the campaign. It validates the costs associated with the effort, be that paid advertising, product development, focus groups or other tactics that cost money but help the campaign meet its goals.

At a basic level, you want to know the amount of exposure your campaign achieves — the amount of “noise” it generates (Health Education Partners, 2006). At Vanguard, we look at the noise factor as one of many that lets us know we got it right, whether that noise took the form of numerous partnerships for a children's initiative, higher-than-expected media exposure for a Hollywood



event or a response from the White House to Twitter messages. It has even come through in the most frustrating and yet flattering ways: seeing an idea or approach copied.

Are your tweets reaching 18- to 24-year-olds in San Antonio? Did people in Denver start jogging because of your awesome exercise promotion campaign? Are social norms transforming, or is education and awareness increasing? If you can answer “yes” to these, you won’t have to justify why the focus group in rural Kansas or the press conference in New York City are needed; they will be proven best practices.

And even when the results show room for improvement, you gain insight about where those improvements are required instead of spending hours in a de-briefing asking “What went wrong?” You don’t have to guess why certain efforts fell short, because the evaluation has told you everything. Such unbiased information can only be achieved through a well-planned and executed evaluation.



Avoiding Unintended Consequences

Sometimes, in our zeal to change the world, we forget to take a step back and evaluate whether a strategy will, in fact, do good or cause more harm. Talking to your audience before you invest money in a campaign can help you generate the right kind of buzz. To illustrate, we offer this cautionary tale:

The Liquor Control Commission of Pennsylvania got caught in the cacophony of a campaign gone wrong with no evaluation measures to set it right. Its “Control Tonight” campaign was designed to empower young women, but accomplished the opposite. The core message was honorable: Be careful when you drink alcohol so you can avoid negative situations like drunk driving, social embarrassment and sexual assault. Messages that were likely not tested among target audiences were perceived as victim-blaming. Erin Gloria Ryan writing in Jezebel interpreted the ad as suggesting, “If you drink too much alcohol and end up getting raped, you should blame both your own drunk ass and your friends.” Unfortunately for the communicators behind this campaign, only the sexual assault message stuck and in response, the whole campaign came tumbling down. In this example, a little formative evaluation could have gone a long way in developing a campaign that created impact rather than insult (Berkenwald, 2012).

The Art and Science of Evaluation

If you need the talking points to convince your boss or Board about the value of evaluation, remember three words: **focus, test and inspire**. Because each of these is results-driven, you should gain traction in selling the cost of an evaluation process to those holding the purse strings.



Focus

As communications campaigns naturally evolve, evaluations can help organizations gain focus and direction for their work, serving as a reminder about what the campaign set out to do. While unintended consequences — both positive and negative — may come to light, the evaluation puts the results in perspective. By sharpening the focus, evaluation can be a disciplining mechanism to get all involved to agree once more on the goals of the initiative and the objectives that fall under them.

Test

Some may argue that “real-time feedback” is synonymous with evaluation, and they’d be right, but the question at the crux of any evaluation is: “Is the campaign effective?” While pilot-testing before a full launch can yield usable results, it is wise to evaluate a campaign at several points in time to make sure that tactics continue to work, messages remain relevant and resources are spent wisely.

Who’s Hungry?



So, now that you’ve caught the evaluation bug, you may be hungry for a little more information about the principles that guide evaluation process and practice in communications. Here are some resources to get you going:

Ethical Standards and Guidelines for Public Relations Research and Measurement:

www.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/Ethical-standards-and-guidelines-for-public-relations-research-ver-1.1.pdf

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook:

www.wkkf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2010/W-K-Kellogg-Foundation-Evaluation-Handbook.aspx

Testing can also take the form of a demonstration project at a single site, or with a smaller media market or target group. In this way, size doesn’t matter — what the test can tell you about your campaign does.

Inspire

Ideally, the process of evaluating should inspire the organization. It can be energizing to have hard data on how the message is being received and by whom, and how audiences are changing behaviors — confirming that the hard work and resources put into the campaign are doing exactly what they’ve been designed to do.

Such results can spark new ideas and foster creativity as well, because few things are as empowering as knowing you were right!



Evaluation—The Starting Point

First off, give yourself a round of applause for deciding to investigate how to actually evaluate communication efforts. This is an important step, especially because most people don't get past the IDEA of evaluation. If you've ever set out to clean up your kitchen and ended up spending two hours organizing the silverware drawer, you're displaying the common traits of an evaluation avoider.

It can certainly be daunting to know where to start. We've been taught that a real evaluation takes lots of money and many, many millenia to truly measure change. But if you do your research, you'll find that in practice, evaluation can be quite straight forward and might even **become your new BFF**.

Two Communication Cousins: The Role of Goals and Objectives in Evaluation

About that cake. Are you visualizing making it? Mixing the eggs and sugar. Adding just the right amount of chocolate. Mmmm ... OK. Back to work. Now think about making something else — nothing specific — just some kind of baked good. Next step, measure the ingredients. What? You don't know what the ingredients are? Oh, that's because you don't know what exactly you're baking! You can see the evaluation lesson coming here, right?

Setting a goal for a communication effort is the same as **determining what you're baking**. And the objectives — you guessed it — they're each of the steps in the process from ingredients to delicious cake. So other than making you very hungry, what does this have to do with evaluation?

Enter two communication cousins: Goals and Objectives. Goals are broad general statements of what we wish to accomplish in the long run. Objectives, on the other hand, break goals down into targeted increments that are specific and measurable, making the overall evaluation a bit easier to chew.

Back to the cake! Instead of mix, roll and frost, communication objectives should be crafted using action verbs like “increase, develop, expand, reduce, promote and advertise” (Royse, Thyer and Padgett, 2010). And while these may seem a bit squishy without actual numbers, achieving them does suggest progress in the most realistic and politically popular of ways — incremental!



Target objectives also can be a rate, such as the proportion of residents in a town who bring reusable bags to the grocery store. It can be an actual number, too, such as the number of people who sign a petition supporting a new clean air regulation. Setting a target too high means failure is much more probable than success, however, and even impressive gains will be overshadowed by unmet target numbers. So you must balance what you'd really like to accomplish with what is really achievable and set your targets accordingly.

Get SMART



Evaluations can benefit from integrating **SMART** objectives, which does not mean that they are ready for the Ivy League necessarily, but rather that they are:

Specific – What exactly is the action, and what is the population or setting?

Measurable – Is it quantifiable, and can we measure it?

Achievable – Can we realistically achieve this goal with the resources and time we have?

Realistic – Does the objective address the scope of the program and propose reasonable steps?

Time-phased – When will the objective be accomplished?

(You could argue that evaluating these objectives for one's high school experience, for example, *would* grant him or her admission to an Ivy League school, but that's another story.)

As you put together SMART objectives, make sure you can answer the following questions:

WHEN: Describe the timeframe for achieving the objective

WHO: Identify the individuals expected to achieve the objective

WHERE: Identify the specific geographic location

WHAT: Describe the action or intended objective

HOW MUCH: Quantify the extent or degree of the objective

(California STD/HIV Prevention Training Center)

Sample SMART objective:

*To increase utilization of free HIV mobile screening services (**specific**) among African-American males ages 18 to 21 in Wards 7 and 8 (**realistic**) in Washington, D.C., by 10 percent (**measurable**) by the end of 2012 (**achievable** and **time-phased**).*



Appreciating the Stages of Change

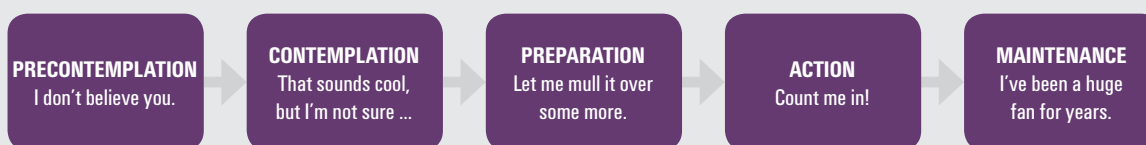
Think of an issue that stokes your passion. Maybe it's energy conservation. Perhaps you care deeply about health care. Or you might just really want to protect access to long, cozy naps. (Not right now. Try to stay awake until the end of the paper. It's worth it!)

Whatever stokes your fires, there's a good chance that many other people don't feel the issue as deeply as you do. While you might be already changing your behavior, others are just now thinking about whether to think about it. We all have varying perspectives about issues. These influence our ability to change our attitudes or behaviors in relation to that issue. Ask one person if your effort was effective and they may look at you cross-eyed, while others would tell you your work changed their lives.

This cycle of understanding, accepting and then taking action is defined as the *stages of change* (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983). Researchers have found that when presented with a situation, people start somewhere on a continuum. They may not want to believe what you're telling them (this is called precontemplation). They may think what you have to say is interesting, but they're not willing to act on what you've said (contemplation). They may be considering taking action based on what you've told them (preparation). They may buy what you're selling hook-line-and-sinker, and jump in feet first (action). Or, they may think what you're telling them is old news — they've been there, done that and now they're simply treading water (maintenance).

What's trickiest when evaluating communication efforts is knowing where your audience sits on the continuum. Some whom you engage may be at the action stage, ready for the guidance that you offer. Others hardly believe your opinion and will take far longer to motivate. Understanding this will help you determine how far you can get your audiences to move. Knowing these limitations is an important part of developing a realistic campaign — and a realistic set of measures for your effort.

Figure 1. The Change Continuum



© 2012 Vanguard Communications, Inc.

Purple Paper™: Evaluating Social Change | @VanComm #PLPR



Think Logically: Incorporating Logic Models in Evaluation Planning

If you've ever coordinated a wedding or another big event, you know that seating is a big deal. You don't want Aunt Bertha sitting next to Uncle Steve, or higgledy-piggledy will ensue. When you're planning who will sit where, it doesn't really work to keep it all in your head. You need to plot it out on a chart, a napkin or 500 sticky notes. Planning to evaluate a successful campaign requires the same type of visual attention. Enter the logic model. Dum, dum, DAH!

**The logic model
captures the
campaign's
ecosystem in its
ENTIRETY.**

Logic models are a way to visualize and monitor the progress of a campaign, a lot like a seating chart or a blueprint for the construction of a building. Most people are familiar with logic models as they're used in public health and social services programming, but logic models are an intuitive fit for the world of communications, too. They take very complex ideas, copious amounts of creativity and lofty goals and convert them into a simple, one-page visual representation. The logic model captures the campaign's ecosystem in its entirety and can easily be shared with key stakeholders throughout the process.

These blueprints also hold a team accountable to everything, from the overarching strategy to the specific outcomes. They link every aspect of a campaign and provide freedom and flexibility by accounting for circumstances and factors that are interdependent and/or beyond your control. Don't you wish you had one for every area of your life?



There is no RIGHT way to present a logic model. They can be big or small, in color or black and white, but they usually incorporate the following sections:

Situation

Situation describes the environment that surrounds your communication effort. We're not talking trees here. This is about the attitudes and circumstances that lead you to believe you need a campaign in the first place.

Priorities

Priorities are the *musts* as you see them. The campaign **MUST** follow your mission. The campaign **MUST** reflect your values. The campaign **MUST** include a banjo player. You get the idea.

Inputs

Inputs are your investments in a campaign, including funding, existing organizations, potential collaborating partners, networks, staff and volunteers, time, facilities, equipment and supplies.

Outputs

Outputs are what we do with the investments, from products and promotional materials to relationships and capacity-building. They reflect what you do and who you reach as part of the communication effort.

Outcomes

Outcomes describe the results you expect to see, both at an individual and a system level. They might include specific changes in attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, skills, status or level of functioning. Outcomes might also include lofty changes that could take a while, like a few years or even a decade. We're talking improved conditions, increased capacity and/or changes in the policy arena.



Assumptions

Assumptions are the factors that must already be in place for your logic model to be, well, logical. Back to the wedding example: In order for your seating plan to even make sense, you assume Bertha and Steve will both attend the event and that the wedding won't be called off due to chilly feet.

External factors

External factors are those things that might happen outside of your control — small and large issues that could waylay your efforts. You're thinking hurricane, right? While that certainly works in the wedding example, it's important to make the external factors less broad and more relevant to the needs and objectives of the campaign, such as current events that make your effort unnecessary or competing, similar communication efforts.

Success indicators

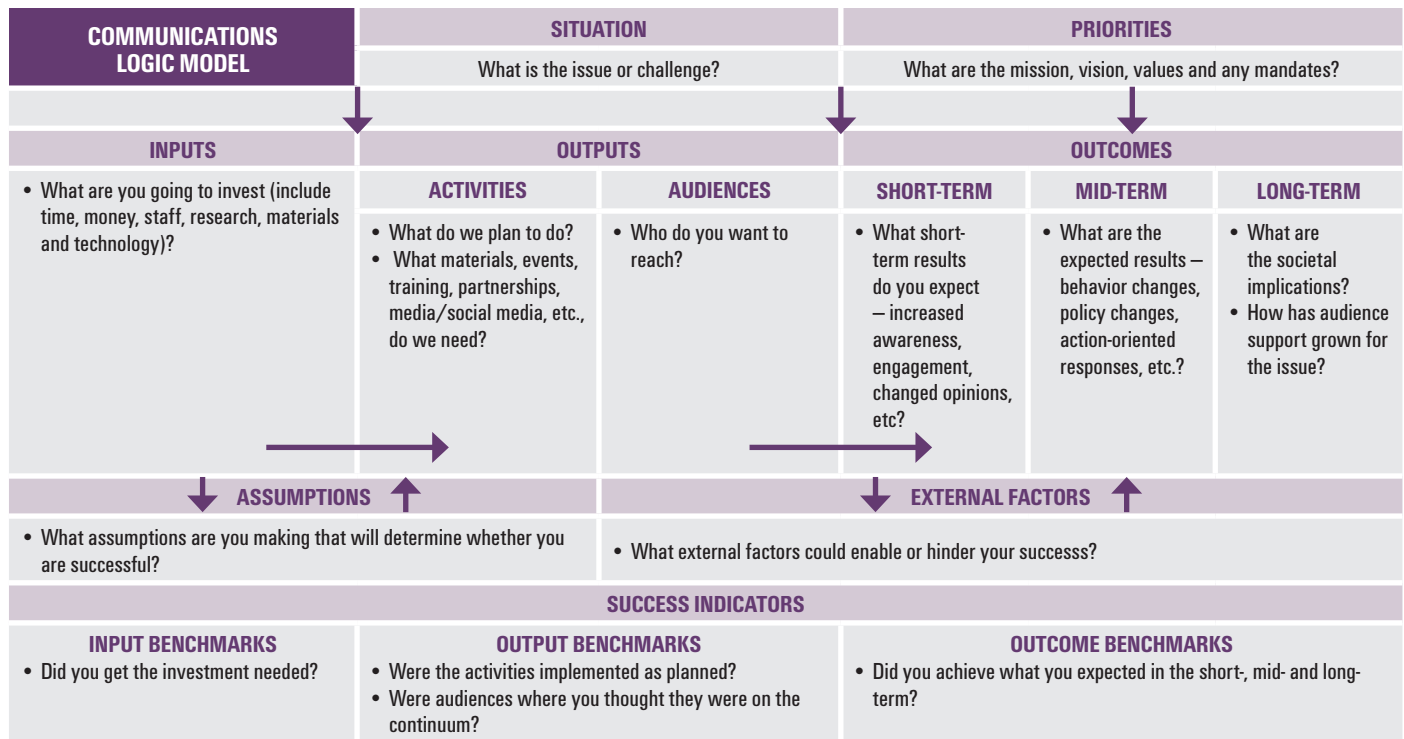
Success indicators are the most direct link between the logic model and your evaluation, and they are the basis for your evaluation questions. This section examines every part of the campaign logic and asks, "What if?" Let's start by looking at inputs. You say an input is funding from a local foundation. The appropriate success indicator, then, is that funds were **ACTUALLY** available. If your campaign falls apart at an early stage, this is how you know what happened.

That was a simple one. Let's try one related to outputs. Perhaps an activity under outputs is an awards ceremony. A critical success indicator might be whether you actually get nominations for the honors.

Finally, a harder challenge. How will you know if you're getting close to your outcomes? What is the evidence? If you hope a campaign will result in more people advocating for your issue, a success indicator could be that a national dialogue is emerging.



Figure 2. Communications Logic Model



© 2012 Vanguard Communications, Inc.

Purple Paper™: Evaluating Social Change | @VanComm #PLPR

Applying a Logic Model to Communication Strategy

Before your next brainstorming session, find or make a template you like, and use a logic model to guide ideas, inspire possibilities and structure the change you seek. Here are some tips to remember:

1. Your desired outcomes and impact should always drive the logic model process.
2. A logic model is always in draft form; inputs, activities and outputs should evolve as the plan evolves. Be sure to revisit your logic model at regular intervals to keep you and your team on track.
3. Logic models function as a tool for consensus organizing. It is nearly impossible to complete a logic model without input from everyone on your team. In the process of developing the model, if there is a lack of consensus, it will most likely be staring you in the face. That's OK, too – uncovering gaps in communal understanding is part of the process.
4. Logic models can increase program investment. Their comprehensive and visual appeal has potential to present a strong case for key decision makers to invest in the areas of your campaign that need it most.



Throughout the process, remember that capturing an entire campaign in a one-page graphic takes time and effort. Be patient to allow creativity and ingenuity to take shape, and conduct research to make sure that you are realistic in your predictions.

Onward!

What's the Plan, Stan?



Hopefully, now it's clear — you can't evaluate without a plan. Knowing what you're measuring and defining what success looks like to you allows for effective evaluation practice. Want to dig a little deeper into goal- and objective-setting, logic models or audiences? These resources will get you there:

An Organizer's Toolkit to Evaluate Communications Effectiveness:

<http://centerformediajustice.org/2011/03/30/measuring-impact>

Glossary of Industry Terminology:

http://amecorg.com/2012/06/glossary_plain_speaking



Evaluation Applied

There's no avoiding it now. After successfully laying the groundwork for evaluation by establishing goals and objectives and creating a logic model, you are on your way to really implementing a communication evaluation plan.

Before you do, it's important to understand that there are really two types of evaluation — those that occur before and during a campaign (formative measures) and those that occur as you gather and process campaign data (summative evaluation).

Formative Evaluation

Think of formative evaluation as communications recon. It produces information that is fed back during the *development* of a campaign to help improve it (Scriven, 1967). It can begin with fact-finding missions using literature reviews, community focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders.

Think of formative evaluation as COMMUNICATIONS RECON.

The core elements of formative evaluation are planning and analysis. We know. We told you about goals and objectives earlier, but these are such critical elements of effective evaluation, we want to reinforce the point: You can't evaluate without a vision for what you're evaluating. Set long-term goals that describe the outcomes you want to achieve and define the measurable steps — objectives — that will allow you to track progress toward that goal.

This is when you begin to understand the needs and motivations of your target audience (Bauman, 2004) and to learn what affects their behavior. Formative evaluation can help you appreciate where your audience falls on the change continuum and can establish the baseline for future evaluation. Did you move your audience from pre-contemplation to contemplation? Are they ready to begin considering a behavior change when previously they were averse to the issue?

Going on guesses or gut instinct is likely to send your whole communication effort in the wrong direction. Analysis is the communicator's lifeline to the science of evaluation. When we launch into a communication effort, we have assumptions about what our audience thinks and feels, and how they might act in response to our campaign efforts. You will have captured these subtleties in your logic model. The formative evaluation stage is your chance to test your hypothesis and



determine if your assumptions are right. This fine-tuning is what it takes to put you on the path to successful communications.



Case Study: Formative Evaluation of the VERB™ Campaign

Challenge: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention saw a need to increase and maintain physical activity among "tweens", or youth ages 9–13. Understanding that kids are influenced by a lot of people, other campaign audience groups included parents and influential adults, such as teachers, physical education and health professionals, pediatricians, health care providers and coaches.

Innovation: Campaign directors conducted formative evaluation between December 2001 and March 2002 to develop the brand, test campaign messages and materials, and determine the media outlets in which the team should advertise (Berkowitz, 2008). The process began with an extensive literature review to better understand the target audience and its attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of social surroundings. Researchers then conducted several interviews and focus groups with a racially and culturally diverse sample of tweens and adults to gather information that would help create a persuasive message. Tweens talked about how they spent their free time and gave feedback on several campaign concepts.

Based on these interviews, researchers felt that the campaign should focus on enhancing self-esteem in kids by encouraging them to engage in fun activities and discover a passion for being active. Finally, the campaign team conducted message testing in April 2002, using interviews and focus groups to elicit feedback on two brand concept possibilities. The participants were asked to weigh in on brand clarity, relevance, acceptability and credibility.

Results: Based on these findings, along with prior concept testing, the CDC selected VERB™ *It's what you do!* as the brand name and concept. The campaign ran from 2002 to 2006 and surpassed its awareness objectives within the first 6 months. The concept was so right on that, even though researchers didn't expect behavior change, they saw significant increases in tweens' activity levels.

Examples of Formative Measurements

Remember the first time you decided to stick your toe in the dating pool? While some people like to just dive right in, others are more cautious, assessing their own weaknesses and strengths, then determining what they might need in a potential mate. Those are the folks who understand the importance of a **needs assessment** to the success of a campaign.

A method of formative research, a needs assessment might begin with an audience analysis or environmental scan to learn about an audience's behaviors and become familiar with events and trends in the environment (Lauzen, 1995). This can be thought of as the intelligence-gathering phase.



Other strategies to consider are exploratory research, which seeks to identify both enablers of and barriers to action, and pretesting, where piloted messages are tested to obtain audience reactions prior to finalizing a campaign (Atkin and Freimuth, 2001).

Tools on this front include:

- **Surveys:** Conducted online or offline, surveys can be powerful tools to ask an audience directly about opinions related to a social issue, an organization's message, structure of web content being presented or the value of a community created in a digital space, for example.
- **Focus groups:** Traditional focus groups, conducted in-person or online, more informal discussion groups and one-on-one interviews are terrific for gathering information directly from an audience. You can learn whether the outreach channels that were identified in the research phase turned out to be legit. For example, women are the most likely demographic group to get health information online. However, you may find that the women who comprise your audience are less likely to participate in discussions on health issues on social networks and more likely to engage in such discussions using more private channels.

Here are some other common tools that would be considered part of a formative evaluation:

Media analysis

Also known as content analysis, this technique is a broad and systematic analysis of the nature of traditional and digital media reporting on a particular topic. The aim is to determine what specific issues are being discussed and how they are being framed (i.e., in a positive or negative light) (Hughes, 2011). (In dating terms, this is the stage where you'd Google that person who just winked at you on Match.com to make sure they aren't married already or are sought by the FBI.) Media analyses can involve collection of either quantitative or qualitative data.

Message audit

Similar to a media analysis, a message audit examines the source, tone and content of specific communication messages, as opposed to a broader examination of media (McCarthy, 2008). (This is where you might check out a prospective date's Facebook page to see what kinds of comments their friends write [are they witty, or blah?], see if you find any embarrassing pictures, etc. It's all about knowing what you're getting into and how you should communicate going forward.) Message audits can help an organization evaluate and improve the effectiveness of their conversations about an issue (Hargie and Tourish, 2000).



Integrated media audit

The role of an integrated media audit is to assess the ability of an organization's many communications channels to successfully convey a message. This might include an analysis of multiple media, including websites, databases, mailing lists and conferences. (Here is where you might direct-message your date's followers on Twitter to unearth any "skeletons.") These audits usually provide organizations with a quantitative analysis, a validation of whether a campaign is reaching its intended target (Buchanan, 1998).



Case Study: The Youth Channel Community Needs Assessment

Challenge: The Manhattan Neighborhood Network (MNN) Youth Channel (YC) sought to bring a youth-dedicated cable network to New York City. The network's goal was to bring high-quality television "made by youth, for youth" into more than 2 million urban homes in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and Manhattan (Castellanos, Bach and Kulick, 2011).

Innovation: Researchers conducted a year-long needs assessment to capture the vision for the project from youth, parents and educators. Rather than follow the traditional needs assessment model, where the researcher or university has greater authority than others on the team, the YC wanted to guarantee that the youth voice was the driver behind the project.

Youth researchers were involved in every phase, including research design, selection and administration of focus groups, data analysis and application of the data to the final report on the study. The research team and community representatives together defined the YC community, which included youth of color, immigrant youth, LGBTQ youth and incarcerated youth. They then identified themes and questions for the needs assessment, which included: How do young people make sense of their contemporary media landscape? What kinds of media are young people using and how accessible are the resources to make this media? How can youth media education and production efforts be used as a tool for community organizing and social change efforts? Understanding that the target population used media in various ways, the YC team gathered information via an online survey, a series of focus groups and individual interviews.

Results: The needs assessment revealed that media spaces are cultural platforms and outlets where they can challenge ideas about social issues. The YC determined it had the potential to become an engaging educational environment where youth can develop creative, social, cultural and technical skills in media production while cultivating a sense of belonging in their community. Upon completion of the study, the researchers noted that their needs assessment model encouraged active participation of the target youth population, which in turn may have provided leadership roles to a group that is often marginalized and disenfranchised.



Summative Evaluation

While formative evaluation does just what it says it does — helps to form a campaign — summative evaluation also does what it says it does — it sums up what's happened. Summative evaluation typically occurs when a campaign reaches certain benchmarks. It gives us the detail we need to persuade Boards of Directors, funders and decision makers that communications is worth the investment. It provides information to help us improve our campaign approaches and determines the effectiveness of the campaign overall.

Here are examples of evaluation techniques that fall under the summative umbrella.

Process

Process evaluation is where most of us start and stop our evaluation. **Counting is fun!** We can count the number of brochures we distributed at a health fair. The number of media hits we earned and the millions of people we reached with our message. The number of followers we have on Twitter and the number of likes on Facebook. Thousands, millions, even billions of people know about our work thanks to the power of communications. Woo hoo! Now that's something to celebrate ... but we secretly know that's only a piece of the evaluation puzzle.



Sometimes, You Need to Count Things

Let's face it — numbers talk, so it's critical to build a system that incorporates ongoing integrated media monitoring, web analytics, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) tracking and social media measurement to determine how well campaigns are faring. You can use the following process evaluation tactics to guide the "conversation":

- **Integrated media monitoring** means tracking the number of mentions, stories or conversations related to your campaign that are taking place in media channels online and offline (traditional press like radio, television and newspapers). Monitoring allows you to quantify the noise your campaign generated about an issue and report concrete numbers about the potential audience reach.
- **Analytics** allow you to track the number of people engaging with a website or social media platform. With analytics, we can track progress toward integrated media objectives including website conversions, traffic sources, visits and time of engagement. Understanding analytics can also help you win the game of SEO, a data-driven chess match that is directly connected to the quality of your digital content and digital interactions.



In plain terms, process evaluation assesses the extent to which a communications campaign is being delivered as it was intended — that is, how true the program is to its blueprint (GAO, 2011). When you look back to your campaign logic model, process evaluation responds to the success indicators for your inputs and outputs. It is also where you can determine the influence of external factors and any missed assumptions. In this phase, evaluators seek to know what happened during the course of a communication campaign. What is being delivered? How much traffic was there to a website? How many views did a video receive on YouTube? We're determining volume and measuring the noise generated by a campaign, not the action the campaign motivated its audience to take — that comes later.

As with a formative evaluation, data collection for a process evaluation is often conducted using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Qualitative strategies such as interviews, focus groups, usability testing and surveys with program staff are particularly useful in that they provide information that is difficult to tease out of quantitative findings: How is the communication campaign being delivered? Are there barriers to implementation, according to the interview subjects? Those delivering the message can often provide unique perspectives on the program — what's working, what isn't working and how it can be adjusted. In addition, direct observation of a campaign in action can again reveal insights about an initiative that quantitative data simply cannot provide.



Case Study: How Evaluation Can Prove Bigger Isn't Always Better

Challenge: What matters more in the social media space — quantity or quality? One team of researchers from Germany, the UK and Brazil set out to determine which impacted social influence more, creating a new technique for measuring influence, grounded in process evaluation.

Innovation: To determine the impact of quantity or quality of social media messages on communication goals, the research team analyzed the number of retweets, number of mentions and number of followers on Twitter. Twitter allowed them to gather data in the form of links and tweets from 80 million users, creating a data set of more than 1 billion tweets. The analysis showed that 6 million users were responsible for 99 percent of all links and tweets. The influence of these 6 million Tweeters was compared with the influence of 52 million users who tweeted more than 10 times, but were not as active.

Results: The study observed that while top users showed a strong correlation in their retweet influence and mention influence, top influentials on Twitter were not necessarily those with the most followers. The bottom line: Quality trumps quantity on social media, though a balance is necessary to ensure messages are received by target audiences. As the study concludes, "By identifying and convincing a small number of influential individuals, a viral campaign can reach a wide audience at a small cost" (Cha, 2010).



Outcome

It's time for a bit more analysis. We're moving beyond counting to assessing awareness. Through qualitative research and analysis, we begin to determine whether we're realizing the outcomes we laid out in our logic model.

Outcome evaluation determines short-term effectiveness and is often directly connected to changes in personal knowledge, attitudes and beliefs. This is where you start to see some progress on the social change continuum. For example, local residents might have been disinterested and unsupportive of local agriculture programs previously. Now there is interest in exploring whether farmers markets are effective tools for increasing local food consumption in the state.

You can decide what to measure by revisiting the campaign logic model. What were your success indicators for short-term outcomes? What research questions did the campaign team agree would prove the efficacy of communications?

Here are some ideas for measurement tactics that can help you evaluate your outcomes:

- **Use surveys, focus groups and media analyses** to determine changes over time. If you're updating your brand, these methods can help you find out if it is effectively communicating and delivering on its mission and promise. Is the brand easily recognizable among target audiences? Have there been any negative reactions to the brand?
- **Create a feedback loop** to measure the success of an event. Feedback opportunities should capture information about the likelihood of event attendees to apply the information they learned in other areas of their work and should be done immediately following the event and at later intervals to determine whether the outcomes are lasting. Tools to create feedback opportunities include online surveys, social media conversations and direct mail inquiries.
- **Conduct media analyses** to determine the outcomes from a training program. Following spokesperson training, monitor coverage to determine whether there are changes in type and tone.



Case Study: Outcome Evaluation of a Syphilis Elimination Media Campaign in Oklahoma County

Challenge: In 2001, Oklahoma County was among the highest in the nation for rates of syphilis (12th in the nation and four times the national rate). The Oklahoma County-City Health Department (OCCHD), funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, sought to introduce a media campaign to its existing efforts to eliminate syphilis using messages of testing and treatment instead of prevention.

Innovation: While many people agree that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," this campaign did not seek a prevention message. Nor did it seek to shame the individuals or provide a moral opinion about the situations that would lead to syphilis. The immediate desired outcome was for the target audiences to get tested, and treated if necessary, and both the messaging and the evaluation were tailored to this focus — that is, on specific, measurable and attainable goals.

The tagline, "Get tested. Get cured." was clear, feasible, and measurable, particularly since the campaign offered its own hotline number that people could access for information on testing facilities and treatment plans. After the campaign implementation, the entire media component was evaluated for efficacy.

Results: OCCHD clinics tested campaign recall four months after beginning, by asking clinic attendees if they could recall if they'd recently seen or heard any information about syphilis, and if so, to describe it. Sixty-six percent of people surveyed remembered seeing or hearing parts of the campaign (whether a radio spot, billboard, poster or bus shelter ad). They also measured attendance at clinics for sexually transmitted infections and syphilis diagnoses compared with the same months during the year before. Among the target population, campaign recall was over 66 percent. The campaign also correlated with a 14–17 percent increase in STD clinic visits, and a monthly average of syphilis diagnoses increase of 18 percent (which though it sounds bad, is actually good, since you can't treat people until you know who is infected). In the year following the campaign's end, the average number of monthly cases decreased by 43 percent.

Impact

Impact evaluation is the Big Kahuna — the most difficult and most expensive of all. It also gives us the answers that fill in the final missing pieces of the measurement puzzle. Impact evaluation looks far beyond the objectives you have set for your campaign and seeks to answer the question, "Was your goal realized?" For example, have there been major improvements in infant mortality rates? Are standardized test scores increasing? Have policies been implemented that improve water quality?

Not only is impact evaluation the hardest to take on, but it's also the hardest to prove. It might take decades to recognize a seismic shift in how society thinks or acts. Because social change happens in the real world, scientists argue that there is little way to know what influenced the results. How can communicators take credit for a societal shift that may have been influenced by



any number of factors? The only way we can is by relying on data. Impact evaluation can't be the only evaluation we perform to measure effectiveness. It is built from the formative evaluation, process and outcome evaluations that show ongoing progress, shifts in strategy and campaign impact over time. By gathering the facts, you can prove that communications played a role in shifting societal norms.



Case Study: United Way of Greater Milwaukee: Using Logic to Tackle Teen Pregnancy

Challenge: When the United Way of Greater Milwaukee (UWGM) released its “If Truth Be Told” report in 2006, chronicling the extreme impact that teen pregnancy had on the community, they set an ambitious goal to reduce teen births by 46 percent by 2015. In response, they needed a strong evaluation plan to demonstrate impact and showcase the value of the hallmark 10-year Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative.

Innovation: UWGM took a smart evaluation approach from the onset of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative. The data and logic model that drove the initial “If Truth Be Told” report outlined the required inputs and activities necessary for strategies to be successful, and included specific, measurable success indicators such as increased knowledge and skills regarding healthy and unhealthy relationships among at-risk youth, increased parent-child communication that lasts throughout childhood and adolescence, and increased access to and utilization of comprehensive reproductive health services. Progress made was evaluated through community discussions, focus groups, youth behavior and opinion surveys, process measures such as media impressions and utilization of materials, and an analysis of public health data to determine progress toward the macro goal of reducing teen pregnancy.

Results: The Initiative has had long-term success reaching all of its objectives. More than 16,000 youth in Milwaukee Public Schools have received curricula to help them make healthy relationship decisions. More than \$4 million in in-kind media has been donated. Data suggest that 46 percent of teens consider their parents the most important influence when making decisions regarding sex. Progress toward the most important impact evaluation measure, however — to reduce teen pregnancy — is most notable. UWGM has recorded a 4-year decline in teen birth rates in Milwaukee, down from 52 to 44.4 births per 1,000 girls (United Way of Greater Milwaukee, 2011).

Cost-Benefit and Cost-Effectiveness Analysis

Cost analysis is an economic evaluation method to help program designers and evaluators determine the relationship between their inputs (monetary resources) and their outcomes (program outcomes) — that is, it helps organizations identify the least costly method to obtain a desired level of output (CDC, 2004). This is your response to the Board's inquiry about ROI, or return on investment. In addition, cost analyses encourage communicators to become knowledgeable about program costs, something very salient to stakeholders and funders (Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman, 2004).



Cost-effectiveness

Cost-effectiveness compares the cost of a program to its effectiveness as measured in communications outcomes. Cost-effectiveness is expressed as a ratio, which represents the cost per outcome (e.g., cost per change in attitudes, or cost per 5 percent increase in high school graduation rates in Washington, D.C., public schools). Relative to a cost-benefit analysis, cost-effectiveness can be less time- and resource-intensive and easier to understand.

Cost-benefit

A cost-benefit analysis requires evaluators to estimate the benefits of a campaign, both tangible and intangible, and estimates of the costs of delivering the campaign, both direct and indirect. By framing all program outcomes in monetary units, decision makers can directly compare the outcomes of different types of communication campaigns. A cost-benefit analysis assigns dollar values to the outcomes attributable to the program.

Putting It All Together: The Evaluation Plan

Now you have a whole lot of information, but it's only useful if you put it to work. The word “plan” can be overwhelming — especially for communicators who are already buried in strategic plans, media plans, marketing plans, retirement plans.... So use any word you'd like to describe how you're going to proceed with evaluating your campaign.

Since we know that a good evaluation can make you a rock star, we're going to call this approach evaluation's “all-access pass.” Here are the steps to get backstage:

1. Gather the people who matter most to your campaign.
2. Together, propose a goal and objectives.
3. Apply your goal and objectives to the development of a logic model.
4. Use your logic model success indicators to determine key evaluation questions.
5. Identify how you will measure or assess each of those questions.
6. Determine timeline, budget and staffing.
7. Conduct formative and summative evaluation.
8. Party like the rock star you are!



Some Parting Advice

There's no question that you are now ready to head out and **conquer the world with your evaluation skills**. Just be careful not to conquer yourself in the process. There are many, many options for evaluating your communication efforts. You don't have to do them all. Part of your job will be getting the group to agree on **what's "good enough."** What can we afford? What can we accomplish with the staff we have? What can we prove?

Don't be scared off by the buffet of options. Choose innovative, low-cost measures that get the job done versus not evaluating at all. Through practice, you'll learn what works. Make sure that your proposed evaluation matches the scope of your communication effort. Don't propose an impact assessment for a short-term, low-budget campaign.

Conquer the world with your EVALUATION SKILLS.

Avoid trying to accomplish all of it alone. There are these great people out there called "grad students" who really know their stuff (thanks, John!). They need projects. You need help. They have access to research libraries. You need access to best practices that will help you narrow your search for measures.

Finally, calm yourself. The prospect of an evaluation carries with it a certain degree of anxiety, because it poses questions for which you may not be prepared to hear the answers. Has your campaign made a difference? Have you spent your budget wisely? Will the Washington Nationals replace the New York Yankees as Major League Baseball's winningest franchise?

OK — **so an evaluation can't tell you everything about everything.**

As long as you go into the process prepared to learn and not just to prove, there's really nothing to fear. Share this philosophy at the outset of an evaluation with those who are in a decision-making position. Get them on board about what an evaluation can and should do, so that no matter the answers to those frightening questions, you can celebrate what was learned, together.

SO WHAT if you don't need more shelf space this year for the latest communications award. Even the campaigns that carry no hardware have incredible value through learned best practices — if they are evaluated.

It's like a blind date. You might have some idea of what to expect from an evaluation, but you won't really know what is possible until you stick your neck out there. And the most successful people don't give up on the entire process as the result of one, or even a few, bad dates.

Be courageous. Evaluate!



References

- Atkin, C. K., & Freimuth, V. S. (2001). Formative Evaluation in Research in Campaign Design. In R. E. Rice, & C. K. Atkin (Eds.), *Public Communications Campaigns* (3rd ed. pp. 125–145). London: Sage Publications.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *The social foundation of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bauman, A. (2004, July). Commentary on the VERB™ campaign — perspectives on social marketing to encourage physical activity among youth. *Prevention of Chronic Disease*. [serial online]. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2004/jul/04_0054.htm
- Berkenwald, A. (2012). Shame And Blame: Facing The Unintended Consequences Of Health Messaging. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/leah-berkenwald/shame-and-blame-facing-th_1_b_1223659.html
- Berkowitz, J. M., Huhman M., Heitzler C. D., Potter, L. D., Nolin, M. J., & Banspach, S. W. (2008). Overview of formative, process and outcome evaluation methods used in the VERB™ campaign. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 34(6), S222–S229.
- Brown, I. S. (1984). Development of a scale to measure attitude toward the condom as a method of birth control. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 20(3), 255–63.
- Buchanan, S., & Gibb, F. (1998). The information audit: An integrated strategic approach. *International Journal of Information Management*, 18(1), 29–47.
- California STD/HIV Prevention Training Center. Retrieved from http://www.stdhivtraining.org/YSMG_goals.html
- Cameron, K. A. (2009.) A practitioner's guide to persuasion: an overview of 15 selected persuasion theories, models and frameworks. *Patient Education and Counseling*. 74(3), 309–317.
- Castellanos, I., Bach, A., & Kulick, R. (2011). Youth Channel All-City: Mapping the Media Needs and Interests of Urban Youth. In P. M. Napoli, & M. Aslama (Eds.), *Communications research in action: scholar-activist collaborations for a democratic public sphere*. (1st ed., pp. 157–176). New York: Fordham University Press.
- Cha, M., Haddadi, H., Benevenuto, F., & Gummadi, K. P. (2010). Measuring user influence on twitter: The million follower fallacy. Proceedings of the Fourth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media (pp. 10–17). Washington, DC: Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence.



Communications Consortium Media Center. (2004, April). Guidelines for Evaluating Nonprofit Communications Efforts, Working Paper #5. Retrieved from <http://www.mediaevaluationproject.org/Paper5.pdf>

Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1975). *Belief, attitude, intention and behavior: An introduction to theory and research*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Hargie, O. D. W., & Tourish, D. (2000). *Handbook of Communication Audits for Organisations*. London: Routledge.

Harvard Family Research Project. (2005). Harvard Graduate School of Education. An Introduction to Theory of Change. *The Evaluation Exchange*, 11(2), 4.

Health Education Partners. (2006). Using Social Marketing for Promotion Program and Health Education Programs. Reach Your Target Audiences: Program Exposure and Gross Rating Points. Retrieved from http://www.healthedpartners.org/ceu/sm/cdcynergy_exposure_reach_grp.pdf

Hornik, R. C. (2002). Epilogue: Evaluation design for public health communication programs. In Robert C. Hornik (Ed.), *Public Health Communication: Evidence for Behavior Change*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hornik, R., & Yanovitzky, I. (2003). Using theory to design evaluations of communication campaigns: the case of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. *Communication Theory*, 13(2), 204–224.

Hovland, C. I., Janis, I. L., & Kelley, H. H. (1953). *Communication and persuasion*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Hughes, C. E., Lancaster, K., & Spicer, B. (2011). Research paper: How do Australian news media depict illicit drug issues? An analysis of print media reporting across and between illicit drugs, 2003–2008. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 22(4), 285–291.

Huhman M., et. al. (2005). Effects of a mass media campaign to increase physical activity among children: year-1 results of the VERB campaign. *Pediatrics*, 116(2), e277–e284.

Jager, W. (2007). The four p's in social simulation, a perspective on how marketing could benefit from the use of social simulation. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(8), 868–875.

Jernigan, D. H., Ostroff, J., & Ross, C. (2005). Alcohol advertising and youth: a measured approach. *Journal of Public Health Policy*, 26, 312–325.

Lauzen, M. M. (1995). Toward a model of environmental scanning. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 7(3), 187–203.



McCarthy, M., Brennan, M., De Boer, M., & Ritson, C. Media risk communication – what was said by whom and how it was interpreted. *Journal of Risk Research*, 2008. 11(3), 375–394.

Organizational Research Services. (2004). Theory of Change: A Practical Tool for Action, Results and Learning. Prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2004. Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/cc2977k440.pdf>

Prochaska, J. O., & DiClemente, C. C. (1983). Stages and processes of self-change of smoking: toward an integrative model of change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 51(3), 390–395.

Royse, D., Thyer, B. A., & Padgett, D. K. (2010). *Program Evaluation: An Introduction (5th ed.)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

Rossi, P. H., Lipsey, M. W., & Freeman, H. E. (2004). *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach (7th Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Scriven, M. (1991). The methodology of evaluation. In *Perspectives of curriculum evaluation*, eds. Ralph W. Tyler, Robert M. Gagne, & Michael Scriven, pp. 39–83. AERA Monograph Series on Curriculum Evaluation, vol. 1. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Siegel, J. T., & Alvaro, E. M. (2006). An evaluation of Arizona's Youth Tobacco Access prevention media campaign. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 30, 284–291.

Stroke Prevention, State Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program. (2011.) Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsdp/programs/nhdsp_program/evaluation_guides/docs/smart_objectives.pdf

United Way of Greater Milwaukee. (2011). *If Truth Be Told... 2006-2011: A 5-year Progress Report on Ending Milwaukee's Teen Pregnancy Crisis*. Milwaukee, WI: Author.

University of Wisconsin System. (2008). University of Wisconsin-Extension, Program Development and Evaluation. Retrieved from <http://miseagrant.umich.edu/downloads/ia/workshops/Intro-to-Logic-Models.pdf>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (2009, January). Evaluation Brief No. 3b: *Writing SMART Objectives*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief3b.pdf>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Adolescent and School Health. (2007). Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign/>



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office of Workforce and Career Development. (2004). CDC Economic Evaluation Tutorials, 2004. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/owcd/eet/Cost/1.html>

U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2011). Applied Research and Methods. Performance Measurement and Evaluation: Definitions and Relationships.

Weiss, C. H. (1998). *Evaluation: Methods for Studying Programs and Policies (2nd ed.)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.