

Creating Our Story

One of the most repeated phrases throughout all of the focus groups was, “**Our evaluations need to tell our story.**” Story telling is an excellent way to describe Indigenous evaluation. Traditionally, lessons are imparted through stories. Telling the program’s story is the primary function of Indigenous evaluation.

The first step in the evaluation process is to reflect on what the program plans to do. In our Framework, we call this **creating the story the program wants to tell.** Then, through the process of story telling, we can examine the story we planned and compare what we thought would happen with what actually happened. Thus, by reflecting on the story (our program) as it unfolds, we fully realize the lessons learned from our experience. Evaluation, as story telling, becomes both a way of understanding the content of our program as well as a methodology to learn from our story. By constantly reviewing our story, we enter into the spiral of reflection, learning from what we are doing, and moving forward.²²

In the basket metaphor, the weaving of an inner and outer wall together gives the basket strength. To fully realize the power of Indigenous evaluation, we weave program implementation together with program evaluation. We start the weaving by describing the story of the program—the story we plan to tell as a result of doing activities that lead to outcomes. As the program is implemented (creating the inner wall), evaluation (as the outer wall), captures the story that emerges allowing for reflecting, learning, and improving the program.

“Through the oral tradition, story becomes both a source of content as well as a methodology.”

Gregory Cajete



Native American Week, Chief Dull Knife College

²² The reference to story as methodology is from Cajete, G., *Native Science: Laws of Interdependence*, Clear Light Publishers, Santa Fe, NM, 1999, p. 94.

Reference



See Indigenous Evaluation Spiral, page 29 in the workbook.

Create the story the program hopes to tell.



Blackfeet-Browning High School Student Project

How to Create the Story

Stories have a plot, activities, characters, beginnings and endings. A program's evaluation story includes these elements. It explains the plot line, the relationship of activities to proposed endings or goals. It identifies the key players, those involved in implementation and those served or influenced by the program. It has a setting—the context in which our program operates. Often, when creating the story, these elements and their relationship are illustrated in a graphic form like a diagram or a drawing.

Illustrating the story should capture the relationships between activities and outcomes. It should also aid in building a shared understanding of how the roles of various actors relate to each other and to the desired outcomes. Diagramming or drawing the activities and outcomes forms a type of storyboard that visually illustrates the program.

By creating the story as an initial step, Indigenous evaluation is similar to the modeling practices promoted by Western evaluators. In Western practice, methods used to illustrate a program's intended story use terms such as: logic model, program theory, or theory of change. In reframing this practice for Indigenous evaluation, we do not recommend any one method or format for describing a story. The sequential ordering of logic modeling or other structured formats may not fit our communities. The model, graphic or drawing used to describe the story are best determined by the program within its own context.

There is no one specific way to approach story creation. The key in story creation is to take time to list or illustrate all the elements and their relationships. This process differs from simply listing goals, objectives and activities, which is the language of proposal writing. In

creating the story, the goal is to describe how the major elements of the program relate to each other to reach the outcomes of the program, or final destination. It is important to consider all the elements that are engaged in conducting the program, and then to connect these to desired outcomes or results.

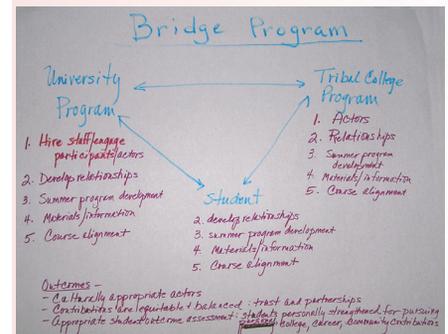
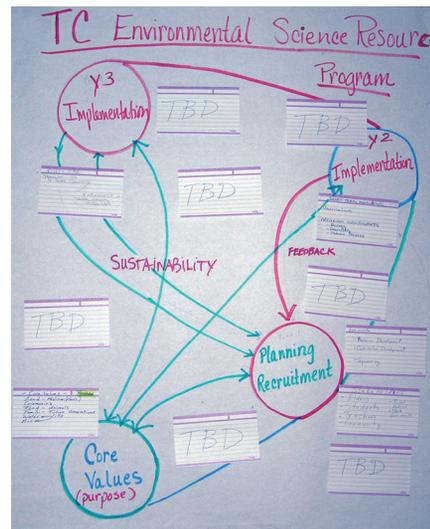
In working on a program's story, it is useful to list or describe:

- Overall mission or anticipated outcomes.
- Context or setting.
- Activities that must be completed to achieve the anticipated outcomes.
- Relationship of activities to each other and to outcomes.
- Resources needed for the activities: (a) human—including those who make the activities happen (staff, volunteers) and those who take part (participants, clients); and (b) other resources needed.

Creating the story involves seeing how the program represents a set of connections that build toward the desired outcomes. It is helpful to draw a diagram that captures these relationships between

Goal of Story Creation:

Describe how program elements relate to one another to reach the destination.



Examples of Diagrams and Drawings of Program Models Developed in Workshops



Paddle to Lummi, Northwest Indian College



Tribal Journeys, Northwest Indian College

the activities and outcomes. Initially, the picture may be incomplete, but it will represent the beginning of a process that allows the program staff, stakeholders, constituents, and the evaluator to understand the purpose and intentions of the work being accomplished.

There are many ways to capture the relationship between activities and outcomes. Whatever form the diagram or drawing takes, it should tell the story of how the activities relate to each other and to the outcomes or goals of the program. Arrows are usually used to show the relationships among the elements of the program.

A program of economic development in the Pacific Northwest where canoe journeying is part of the culture is considering a model based on drawings of canoes with the paddles illustrating activities, the paddlers representing staff and stakeholders, the stopping points along the journey are the short term outcomes, and the final outcomes are shown at the final destination for the journey. The format for telling the story can evolve over time. For example, in the canoe journey program metaphor described above, the program model began with a more traditional logic model design recommended by the program funders. However, using a metaphor relevant to the culture will communicate the story more effectively in the community.

Example of Story Creation

To illustrate a story, let's look at a summer employment program for youth. In this community, concern over students dropping out of high school and having few opportunities to see the value of education inspired the tribe to develop the summer work program. The program has a number of activities, including: recruiting youth, providing training for good work habits, recruiting employers, matching youth to jobs, monitoring their employment, and celebrating

their accomplishments at the end of the summer. The major outcomes anticipated could be: creating good work habits among youth, creating interest among youth in school (as a result of experiencing the relationship between school and employment), and improving subsequent school performance.

This project is modeled into the story we hope to tell on page 52. This model links activities with immediate or short term outcomes and long term outcomes. In this example, the staffing for the program may be two or more people. In developing the story, it is useful to note who does what and how the activities relate to outcomes.

The Logic Model

Many funders are asking that the diagram of a program follow a specific model. The most common model, logic model, is a sequential diagram that shows the linkages between resources, activities, outputs or short term outcomes, and long term outcomes. There are variations of the model, for example, outputs might follow activities and then link to outcomes. Outcomes can be divided into short, intermediate and long term. The basic logic model is illustrated below.



We encourage an approach to story modeling that is more creative than the basic logic model. As we have stated, we encourage the drawing of a model that communicates the story in a way understandable in the community. However, if funders require a specific template, we recommend that you consider developing a program model that fits your community and, for your funders, adapt it to fit their template.

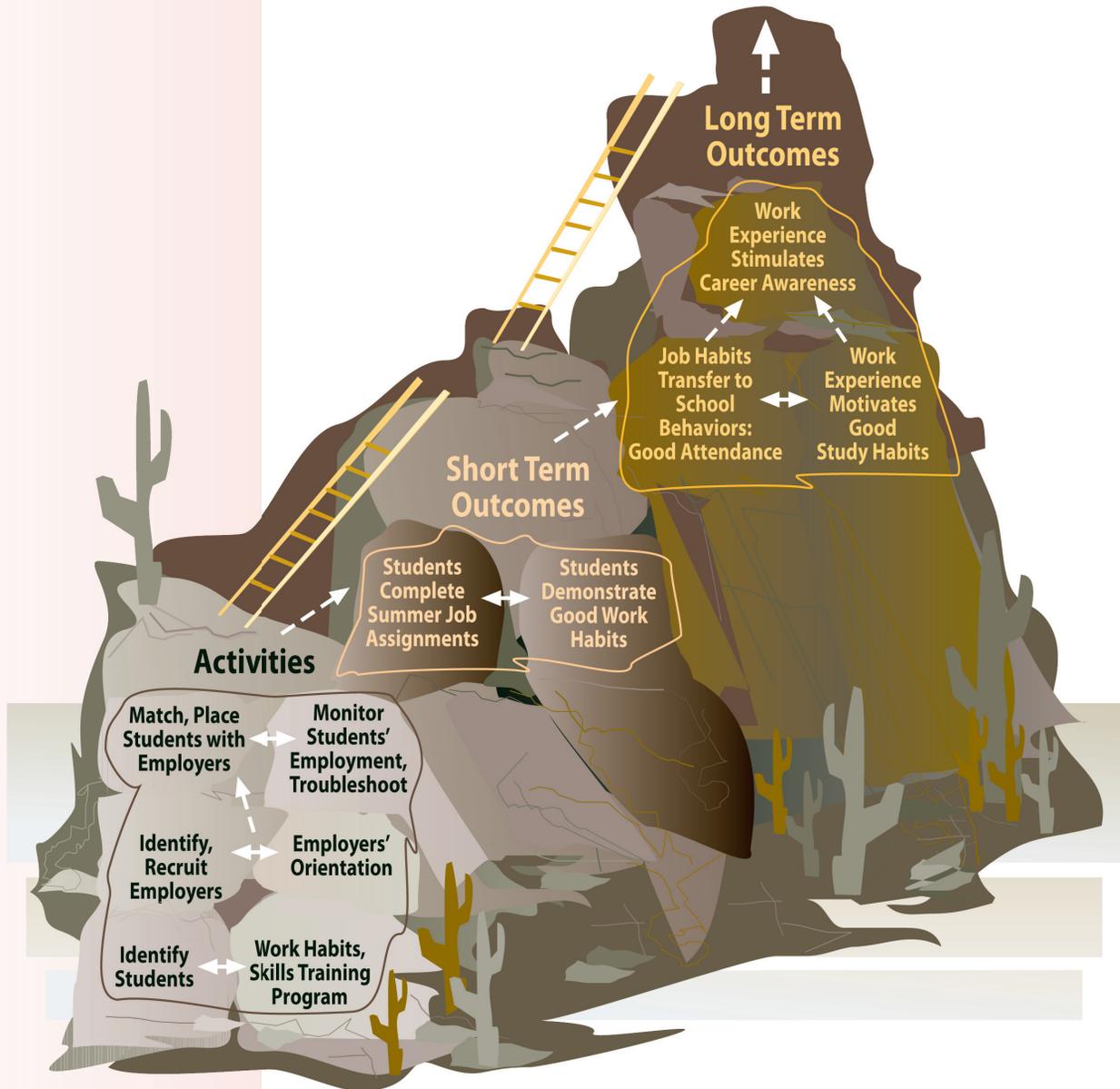
Reference



Examples of different approaches to diagramming or drawing a program's story are found in the Resources section.

One Illustration of the Story of Summer Employment Program

Summer Employment Students Graduate and Seek Higher Education



In reframing evaluation, the style of storyboarding should be determined by the situation and preferences of the program stakeholders. **Taking time at the beginning of the program to reflect on the program, to Create the Story is critical. This activity is the first step in linking evaluation to program implementation.**

Identifying Program Assumptions

Another useful activity is to identify how the activities relate to the program hunches or assumptions. Earlier, we described that when a program is designed, it can be thought of as a hypothesis, or a series of hunches about how and why the program activities will result in certain anticipated outcomes. These hunches are the assumptions that underlie the reasoning of the program (why the program should work). It is possible to implement a program exactly as planned, and yet, the anticipated outcomes are not realized. In such cases, the program may have been built on faulty assumptions. It did not fail in the implementation; rather, the theory (the set of hunches) was not on target. Evaluation becomes an even more powerful learning process when we track not only progress in implementing the program, but also examine the assumptions underlying the work. This is important in framing an Indigenous evaluation as, often, assumptions are culturally embedded.

In the job training example, one assumption is that there are jobs for youth that demonstrate the value of furthering their education. Also, we assume that the employers are willing to hire youth. Another assumption is a link between good work habits and school behaviors. Some assumptions are fundamental to program implementation (staff is available in the summer to run the program, or even more fundamentally, there are people with the appropriate skills to staff the program). When such basic assumptions do not prove true, they can handicap a program from the start.



Sitting Bull College Students with Elder

Indigenous evaluation is by its very nature a capacity building exercise.

Navajo Technical College Greenhouse Project



There is no formula for identifying the assumptions. Listing the assumptions made in designing a program creates a deeper understanding of the plot lines for the story you want to tell. The article, “Which Links in Which Theories Shall We Evaluate” describes the process of using the program’s assumptions to guide an evaluation.

Creating the story and identifying assumptions are similar to the Western evaluation practice of developing program theory. We support using the basic idea of conceptually modeling the relationships in the program and developing its theory of change. Within the AIHEC Indigenous Evaluation Framework, this is simply the act of creating the story of the program and how its parts, such as staffing and other resources, activities, outcomes, fit together.

Grounding the Story in Core Cultural Values

As the process of creating the story begins, evaluator and program staff are provided with an excellent opportunity to consider core cultural values in the Indigenous Framework such as including community or considering multiple ways to describe accomplishment and outcomes. Some important elements of program stories are not necessarily included in Western practice, but are essential in making evaluation responsive in our communities. When working from the AIHEC Indigenous Evaluation Framework, the evaluator should take care to place the program’s story into the setting and also to involve community as much as possible.

Often, when writing a proposal for a desired program, the goals and objectives usually reflect the priorities of the funding agency since the agency develops the criteria for how the proposal will be assessed. However, given the place-based situation and the focus on community inherent in our values, program staff may have goals for



programs beyond those expressed in a proposal. In telling the story, the evaluator and staff need to consider not only the plot line of the funded program, but also its relationship to other programs and events in the community. This is especially important for tribal institutions that are implementing multiple projects that are aimed at similar needs, concerns, and outcomes and funded under different grants.

At one focus group meeting, a participant expressed a common frustration faced by many tribal programs: the need to bend funding requirements to the situations of our communities. He described the disjunction between the requirements in many requests for proposals and the issues the community is really trying to address. In this case, it is useful to look carefully at all the things we are trying to accomplish and how we might take advantage of the program we have (although not perfectly aligned with our needs) and make whatever connections are possible to meet our priorities.

Making Connections and Expanding Horizons

An excellent example of making connections and expanding program horizons is found in the article, “Indigenizing Evaluation Research” about Project CIRCLE at Pine Ridge, SD.²³ Initially, this program to improve the criminal justice system on the reservation had as its goal a percentage reduction in the reservation crime rate. However, after the program staff took a broader look at the program’s possibilities and considered its interface with the community, they changed the project’s scope to rebuilding the criminal justice system from an Indigenous perspective. They revised their goals to look at root problems in the organization and orientation of the current system and recast the project as Nation Building.

²³ Robertson, P., Jorgenson, M. & Garrow, C. “Indigenizing Evaluation Research” in *The American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3 & 4 (Summer/Fall 2004). University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE. 2004, p. 499, 506-507, 519.

Engage Community in Story Creation

- *Staff*
- *Stakeholders*

Be Inclusive

- *Situated in community*
- *Expand story to show relationship within community*

Reference



See Readings articles, “Which Links in Which Theories Shall We Evaluate,” “Indigenizing Evaluation Research.”



Salish Kootenai College

Much of Indian education, including operational funding for TCUs, depends on funding from different federal agencies and foundations. It is all too easy for staff and constituents working under one grant to become centered on their specific program, rather than considering how their project may fit into the larger picture of community programs and constituencies. When programs operate in isolation from each other, this is sometimes known as the silo effect.

The silo effect is often fueled by demands to attend to the needs and requirements of the granting agency, sometimes at the expense of opportunities to collaborate or coordinate with other programs within the community to achieve similar goals. Rather than viewing programs independently, it is useful to see them as interrelated, perhaps as trees in a grove. Using this metaphor, we can view each tree as a separately funded program; however, the root systems are intertwined, tapping into the soil nutrients and the same water sources which nurture the health of the entire grove. Thus, it is important to consider how each program we are evaluating links to all the other programs or institutions contributing to the health and welfare of the community.

An evaluation of a parent education program on a small reservation provided a lesson on the importance of casting a wide net to capture the potential impacts of a program. The funders expected a fairly straightforward story. The plot line was the funding of two staff members who would recruit at-risk families into structured parenting classes. However, when the evaluators worked with the staff and the community to outline the story, the plot line was significantly revised.

The staff assumed that the primary problem in delivering parent education services was the lack of collaboration across the number of family-related and health-related departments in the tribe. Acting on



their assumptions, they believed that many of the departmental programs presented natural opportunities to deliver parent education. Consequently, they developed staff retreats to bring tribal employees together to discuss ways in which to collaborate, organized tribal wide train-the-trainer parenting education classes so that each appropriate program could offer such classes, and encouraged the development of formal parent training in the Head Start program and in the women's substance and alcohol abuse program.

Initially, the funders were concerned that the program staff was not following the program design to conduct parent education classes and not meeting their expectations. However, once they understood the way in which the program staff was casting the project more broadly to incorporate the tribal community programs, they welcomed the effort. Even though this project is no longer funded externally, its work is being continued through other tribal programs with sustained funding and parent education has been incorporated into tribal programs.

Engaging Community

Engaging community is an important element of Indigenous framing. Knowing when and how to include community is an ongoing responsibility, and each program evaluation will need to sort out the engagement processes. If we value community, engagement should begin early, during the first step of story creation.

Evaluative statements can help guide the inquiry process.



Kyi-Yo Powwow at University of Montana

Approaches for engagement will vary depending on the different community constituencies. It is possible to engage the community in phases with the staff and evaluators working together to make the first attempt at describing the initial story. This story can form the basis for further discussions with other segments of the community: staff in other programs or departments, elders' councils, tribal leaders, students, or client groups. When asking various groups to review and contribute to the program's story, the evaluator should follow a respectful process that invites everyone to contribute his/her views, and to identify where there is consensus and where there are differences in perceptions. These consultations will help clarify and situate the program and establish its relationship to the setting and place.

Examining the Story

Once the program story has been created and assumptions are defined regarding what is needed to make the story work, the next

stage in evaluation planning is to describe what is important to learn as the story unfolds. In the "Indigenizing Evaluation" article, the Lakota elders translated their ways of knowing into the English word, inquiry. An inquiry process is



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fundamental to evaluation. In the reframing process, Indigenous evaluation can examine the story by posing evaluation questions in ways similar to Western practices. Posing questions sets the inquiry into the program's journey and serves as a guide for the information that must be collected to tell the story.

In the focus groups, it was noted that in some tribal communities, asking questions directly may be considered rude or intrusive. Reframing questions as evaluative statements can help guide the inquiry process. Using evaluative statements establishes situations we will explore through our process of inquiry. Formulating evaluative statements can be challenging, but it is a positive alternative to the use of direct questioning which may adversely affect the evaluation process.

Questions or statements should generate information to engage the spiral of action, reflection, learning, and moving forward.

Questions or statements can be developed at different levels and for different purposes. They can explore program assumptions or track implementation. They will guide the structure of the evaluation.

Overarching Key Questions or Statements

These are the main questions or statements that, when answered or explored, describe the entire program story. They are most often the level of questions that are included when writing the evaluation section of the proposal to a funder. Although major questions are



*Indigenous Evaluation
Spiral—The interaction of
action, reflection and learning.*

drawn from a specific program's content, some general examples of major questions (and their reworking as statements) include:

Key Question	Evaluative Statement
Was the program implemented in the ways anticipated? If changes were made, what reasons or situations influenced the changes?	We will track our implementation to learn how it unfolded, what changes occurred, and what influenced changes.
How well did the program serve the intended population?	It is important to know how people benefited from our program.
How well did the program's activities lead to the desired outcomes?	We want to understand how the program activities make a difference, especially in causing changes we hope to achieve.
What are the major lessons learned?	We need to learn from the work we do so we can continue to make improvements.

In our example of the summer employment program for youth, we might pose the following major questions or evaluative statements:

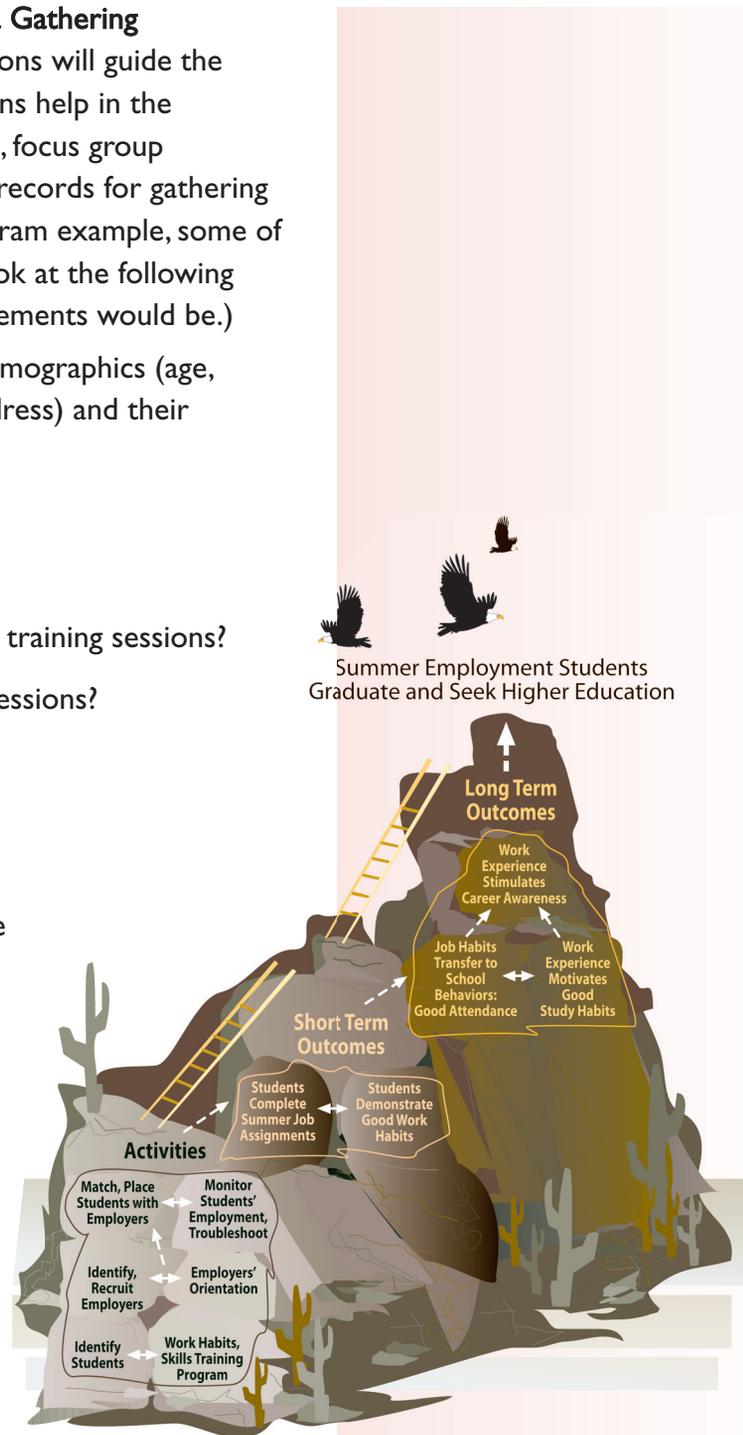
Key Question	Evaluative Statement
How many youth participated and did those participating meet the demographics of the program?	We want to know who participated and whether they were the youth for whom the program was designed.
How satisfied are the youth and the employers with the project?	We need to understand the experience of both the youth and employers and whether each was a good experience.
Were any of the youths' work habits carried over to their school behaviors?	We want to follow our youth after they return to school. We want to see if the program changed their attendance and academic performance.
What major lessons were learned from the summer experience?	We have lessons to learn so we can continue to improve this program when it is offered next summer.



Detailed Questions that Guide Design and Data Gathering

As an evaluation unfolds, a number of questions will guide the specific inquiry into the program. These questions help in the development of tools—such as interview guides, focus group questions, surveys or review of documents and records for gathering the information. In the youth employment program example, some of these questions might be as follows. (As you look at the following questions, think about what your evaluative statements would be.)

- Is there any relationship between youth demographics (age, school attendance, performance, home address) and their successful participation in the program?
- How were youth recruited?
- What recruitment strategies worked best?
- What was the attendance for the job-skills training sessions?
- How satisfied were the youth with these sessions?
- How were employers recruited?
- What types of jobs were most effective in inspiring youth to do well in school?
- How satisfied were the employers with the program?
- Is there any relationship between job placement and youth participation in the program?



The list can go on and questions will emerge as the evaluation unfolds. Various types of questions can provide structure to guide an evaluation. Combining the type with the content of a program will yield a good set of questions to guide the information gathering process.

Types of Questions/ Statements ²⁴	Examples
Program Progress	Describes what is going on: who is participating and the amount of participation.
Program Outcomes	Describes the anticipated changes such as: better performance or more interest in science.
Relationship of Outcomes to Program	Connects outcomes to the program: comparison of performance of those in the program to a group not in the program or assessment of the results of the program.
Links between Process and Outcomes	Explores how process relates to outcomes: relationship of participants' characteristics to outcomes.
Explanations	Explores how or why: examination of program assumptions.

²⁴ Adapted from Weiss, C., *Evaluation*, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ, 1998, p. 75-76.

Process and Outcome Evaluation

The preceding table describes two major functions of an evaluation—the assessment of the program’s process and its outcomes. Process evaluation looks at what is happening during the implementation of the program—who is being served, and what services are being offered. Understanding how the program is being implemented and for whom it is serving are important elements in our story. We can learn much from our reflections on how the program is unfolding.

Outcome evaluation describes what the program accomplished, the end results. Since the program’s story predicts outcomes or results, evaluation needs to carefully consider what outcomes are important to consider. Often, outcomes that are not anticipated may occur. These also provide insights and learning. The important concern is to use evaluation to understand the range of outcomes that were achieved and, to the greatest degree possible, the relationship of the program’s processes to the outcomes.

In our example of a summer youth employment program, we may find that we did not get the enrollment we anticipated from a certain school or geographic area (looking at the program’s processes). This information is important in planning for marketing or transportation services. We may find that the program was especially successful in improving the school behavior of youth who worked in the tribal Natural Resources Department, compared to those who were at other work sites. This could be an important outcome finding. This information helps us look at the youth’s employment experience in the department (an aspect of the program’s process) to see if it can be used as a model for other employers. In this example, we see the value of looking at both process and outcomes to search for insights gained about their relationships.



Formative and Summative Purposes of Evaluation

The words formative and summative are familiar terms in Western evaluation. They are used to describe the functional uses of the evaluation findings. Formative evaluation uses information from the evaluation while the program is being implemented to make changes or improvements. Summative evaluation looks at the final results—it summarizes the final outcomes and learning. Process and outcome evaluation can be used for both formative and summative purposes.

Telling the Story

This section describes how evaluation works closely with stakeholders to create the story of the program. It explains ways to identify what is important to learn or examine from the story of the program as it is implemented; common activities in Western evaluation practice, but we have reframed these practices. We

encourage careful use of language, avoiding terms such as logic modeling or developing a theory of change, by focusing on the more familiar and straightforward explanation, creating and telling a story.

Evaluation will help us reflect on and learn from the story we are telling by using inquiry to capture information. Developing evaluation questions guides this inquiry. In the reframing of Western practice, we suggest that developing



*Sitting Bull College Environmental Science
Students Conduct Scientific Research in a
Tropical Environment*

evaluation statements may be more appropriate in our communities and illustrate how questions can also be statements. However, we are not saying that questions are not useful or appropriate, only that alternatives to questions should be considered and used if this fits the culture of the community and situation of the program.

As the program is implemented, the story unfolds. By tracking this unfolding, we set up an inquiry into the relationships between our assumptions regarding the relationship of activities to outcomes. Story creation is the first stage of an evaluation. It is part of the foundation to the basket that joins evaluation with implementation. It establishes the parameters of the evaluation and direction of the inquiry, and sets the stage for creating knowledge—the knowledge that leads to learning. Respecting our traditional values, we have a responsibility to use this knowledge to move forward.

In the next sections, we describe evaluation design and the methods for collecting the data that inform the evaluation. These activities are woven throughout the implementation of the program. They define the outer wall of the basket as it is woven.

FRAMEWORK

Creating Our Story

