

Evaluating Programming

Evaluation is an essential and often forgotten step in youth ministry. Program evaluation is not a luxury. If our youth ministry programs hope to make a noticeable difference in young people's lives, we must concern ourselves with effectiveness. Did our programming accomplish what it set out to do? If our youth ministry programming is not achieving its intended goal, it is ineffective and must be changed.

The purpose of program evaluation is change for the better. Program evaluation is a systematic and objective process which compares what the program intended to do with what the program actually accomplished, to determine how the program can be improved. It needs to be a regularly scheduled process. Evaluations should be conducted at the completion of each individual program, after a season of programming, and at the end of the program year. The young people, the volunteer leaders (adults and youth), parents, and parish staff should all be involved in the evaluation process.

Is the evaluation process really worth the time and effort? Yes! An evaluation can provide affirmation and legitimization for your efforts, thereby giving the youth ministry solid backing in the parish. Through an evaluation process programming can be altered. Program plans can be reviewed and redefined. New needs and new interests among youth and their parents can come to light and be addressed. The overall operation of the youth ministry can be strengthened and even streamlined.

Following the evaluation of programming, the results and findings should be reported to all who participate in the process, and to all the others interested in or involved in the youth ministry. These findings should give details about the decisions that program leaders have made and describe the actions that have been taken following the evaluation process.

In this section you will find two evaluation processes that you can adapt to meet your specific needs:

- *Evaluating an Individual Youth Ministry Program* is designed to evaluate an individual program.
- *Evaluating the Overall Youth Ministry* is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of your overall youth ministry at the end of a programming season (Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer) or the end of a program year (e.g., May or June).

1. Evaluating Individual Youth Ministry Programs

Step 1: Develop a participant evaluation form using the sample questions on the following worksheet.

Step 2: Conduct a participant evaluation at the conclusion of the program.

Step 3: Based on the results of the participant evaluation, gather your program leaders or planning team for this particular program and review the results.

Step 4: In light of the evaluation results, review your original program plans for this particular program using questions like the following:

- How well did we accomplish our goals for this program?
- How effective was our programming strategy for this goal?
- Did we select an appropriate scheduling model, date, time, and place for this program? What could we do differently next time.
- Did our implementation plan and timeframe work effectively? What should be modified?
- Did we have enough leaders to conduct the program? Were their jobs clear? Were they properly trained? Did they conduct the program effectively? How could their performance be improved or strengthened.
- Did we have adequate resources and funds to conduct the program?
- Was our publicity plan effective? How could it be strengthened?

Step 5: Based upon the results of your discussion, determine the future of this particular program, e.g. continue the program as originally planned *or* continue with modifications *or* redesign the program *or* discontinue the program.

Step 6: If you decide to continue the program make changes in your program design.

2. Evaluating the Overall Youth Ministry

This evaluation is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of your overall youth ministry using the goals and framework of the comprehensive model. It can be used at the end of a programming season (Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer) or the end of a program year (e.g., May or June). This process should be conducted with your entire planning team or coordinating team. You may also want to invite program leaders from each area or component to participate in this evaluation meeting.

Step 1: Begin with individual program evaluations. If you have conducted individual program evaluations throughout the year or season, review these evaluations, and then make a recommendation for the future of each program based upon your evaluation using on the following options:

- continue the program as originally planned
- continue with modifications
- redesign the program
- discontinue the program

If you have organized your ministry into planning or leadership groups based on the components, you can ask each group to develop recommendations for their programming.

Step 2: Record all program recommendations on newsprint by making four columns (one for each type of recommendation) and listing each program, component-by-component, under the appropriate column.

Step 3: Rate the overall effectiveness of each component's programming using the following rating scale: 1 = no programs; 2 = needs major improvement; 3 = adequate, needs continued development; 4 = good, an effective component; 5 = very good, a real strength in our ministry. In order to determine the effectiveness of each component reflect on the following questions:

- How effective were the individual programs offered in this component? (Refer to your individual program participant evaluations for assistance.)
What programs were most successful? Why?
- How effective was this component in addressing the priority needs identified in the planning process?
- How effectively did this component utilize the four ministry settings: youth programming, family, church community, civic community. Did this component overemphasize youth programming and neglect family, parish, and community?

- Did this component overuse gathered programming and underutilize small group or individualized methods?
- Was there enough *variety* in program scheduling to address the needs of youth and families?
- Was there a *variety* in program environments?
- Did we offer young people the freedom to select the programs that best address their needs and interests?

If you have organized your ministry into planning or leadership groups based on the components, you can ask each group to conduct their own evaluation.

Step 4: Summarize your evaluation by asking the group to response to the following question (without comment or discussion!). List the responses on newsprint. You may want to summarize your evaluation component-by-component.

- **Questions 1:** *Our evaluation says to me that our current parish youth ministry efforts/programs are....*

Spend time identifying and discussing those items that best reflect the planning group's assessment of the past season's or year's youth ministry effort. Place an asterisk in front of items that the group feels best reflect the current effort.

Step 5: Develop recommendations for action by brainstorming responses to question 2 (without comment or discussion!). Once again write all responses on newsprint. You may want to ask for recommendations component-by-component.

- **Question 2:** *In order to strengthen our programming for the next season or year, we need to....*

Discuss the list with the group. Identify the most important recommendations and place a check in front of them. Review the recommendations and make sure the list reflects the most recommendations for action.

Step 6: Ask the group if any new youth or family needs have surfaced in the past season or year from evaluations or from their personal observations. Discuss these new needs. Record the new needs on newsprint and ask the group to identify up to five priority needs from the list.

If you conducted a needs assessment in your original planning process, review the summary of your priority needs with the group. Identify the priority needs that you are already addressing. Compare and contrast this list to the needs identified by the group (above).

Ask the group to discuss the feasibility of adding new needs (from the original needs assessment and the evaluations/observations) to their planning for the coming. If you choose to add new priority needs, select the needs are most important.

You are now ready to begin planning for a new season or a new year.

This resource is provided by the Center for Ministry Development.
For more information about ministry training and resources,
please contact Tom East at tomeast@cmdnet.org or (253) 853-5422

Sample Questions for Evaluating Your Youth Ministry

1. What are some of the strengths of our youth ministry programming?
2. What are some of the apparent weaknesses of our youth ministry programming?
3. For the coming year, what should we try to do more of, or concentrate on, in order to strengthen our programming?
4. For the coming, what specific changes should we make in this ministry?
5. How effective is our youth ministry in addressing the needs and interests of youth?
Ineffective 1 2 3 4 5 Very Effective
Suggestions for Improvement:
6. How effective is our youth ministry in addressing the needs and interests of the parents and the families of adolescents, and involving them in our ministry?
Ineffective 1 2 3 4 5 Very Effective
Suggestions for Improvement:
7. How effective is our youth ministry in involving young people in the life and ministries of the parish community?
Ineffective 1 2 3 4 5 Very Effective
Suggestions for Improvement:
8. How effective is our parish community in welcoming young people and incorporating them into our community life and leadership roles?
Ineffective 1 2 3 4 5 Very Effective
Suggestions for Improvement:
9. What signs do you observe among our youth, or within our wider faith community, that indicate our youth ministry is having a positive effect?
10. Please give us one or two ideas on how we could improve our efforts.