

# ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT FOR EVALUATION

## CREATING CULTURES OF CURIOSITY IN THE ANTI-SEXUAL VIOLENCE MOVEMENT

*Sexual violence preventionists are committed to nurturing positive social norms and an ethic of care and concern for others. We know social change is a long-haul endeavor. It does not happen overnight. As strongly as we feel we are making a difference, how can we show others things are actually changing?*

The goal of this resource is to explore ways organizations can nurture a culture of evaluation in sexual violence prevention. The information provided draws from a series of focus groups conducted in 2014 with preventionists at coalitions and state health departments on the evaluation strengths and needs of the anti-sexual violence movement. This resource accompanies a podcast series on evaluation called *Mapping Prevention Podcast Series*: <http://tinyurl.com/o8p9qwq>

### Why evaluate?

Evaluation is increasingly a part of our work in the anti-sexual violence movement. For the purpose of this document, evaluation is defined as: a thoughtful and intentional process that helps to both inform a prevention strategy's goals and objectives and measure its impacts. There are many ways to evaluate our work. But first, it is helpful to take a step back and think about the many ways evaluation can work for us—how evaluation can help strengthen our processes and transform our organizations, communities, and the larger movement to end sexual violence.



The word “evaluation” sometimes conjures up anxiety and frustration. In an era of limited funds and increased accountability, evaluation has become a core requirement of most local, state, and federal funders. But the value of evaluation does not begin and end in the numbers reported to funders.

There are many other reasons to evaluate sexual violence prevention strategies:

## Evaluation ...

- Is for us. It helps us tell our story. It helps us illustrate the complexities of our movement—what we have learned in the 40+ years we have been doing this work, what we have heard from survivors, what we have learned from our communities, and what we are seeing shift over time.
- Is part of ethical practice. Evaluation helps us describe how we are using our resources and time in the most effective way possible.
- Allows us to identify and share our progress and strengths in tangible ways. This can support our efforts in building collaborations and partnerships, recruiting a vibrant workforce, raising funds, and establishing credibility and trust in the communities we serve.
- Allows us to identify and address areas that are not working and that need adjustments. This allows us to be most responsive to the ever-changing needs of communities and what is known about sexual violence prevention.
- Supports us in our strategic planning process and in ensuring that our prevention strategies are leading us to specific short- and long-term organizational outcomes.

## How organizations can support evaluation

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We may understand the importance of evaluation, but translating that philosophy into action can be challenging. Realistic barriers such as a lack of time, funds, skills, and staffing can impede evaluation. Our work increasingly demands a diverse range of skills among preventionists: a grounding in the complexities of sexual violence, an ability to mobilize

strategies to affect change and prevent sexual violence, and skills in evaluating the effectiveness of prevention efforts over time. This combination of skills and backgrounds is not always found in the same person, in the same team, or even in the same organization. It can seem overwhelming to consider evaluating a prevention strategy when we are still working on building the foundational pieces around sexual violence and its prevention amid turn-over.

However, in focus groups with preventionists doing this work, they identified several key organizational components that can help support evaluation in the anti-sexual violence movement over time:

- Leadership is invested in understanding the outcomes of prevention strategies beyond “just the numbers.” Leaders foster an environment of learning and a spirit of curiosity about evaluation (and other aspects of our work). When evaluations show that things are not working, it is not about finding blame; it is about tweaking and bridging and growing.
- Evaluation is integrated into the organization’s day-to-day operations. Evaluation is not an after-thought, perceived as something separate from the work, or approached as something that pertains to only a handful of efforts. Staff members are able to see how evaluation is a part of the agency’s work today and in the future. For example, evaluation is a part of strategic planning, linking each effort to a theory of change that affects the organization’s mission over time. It is part of developing goals and objectives for individual teams and departments, creating logic models and evaluation plans for specific services and



programs, and assessing the effectiveness of the organization's communications, meetings, and supervision.

- Evaluation is understood as a process that involves many possible tools and strategies that are culturally-relevant and anchored by the "right" questions. Questions that resonate and reflect the realities of our communities, enable us to take action, and help us understand the real value of our work.
- A theory of change or logic model helps to link specific strategies to short, intermediate, and long-term prevention outcomes. Data are not collected just for the sake of collecting data. Measurements are selected based on cultural-relevance and their ability to collect the specific data that will lead to intended

outcomes. Once collected, data do not sit on a shelf or stay in a folder. They are analyzed and applied to make prevention strategies and the organization stronger.

- Staff members are supported in growing and applying their evaluation skills through ongoing training, supervision, and other sources of professional development. The organization seeks out partnerships, training, and technical assistance resources to sustain staff in building and applying their evaluation skillset.
- Funding is cultivated to support evaluation through grant set-asides or other funds to create a dedicated line item in the budget over time.

- A sustainability plan is in place to address turn-over and restrictions on funds and time.
- Partnerships with evaluators, local universities, and allied social change professionals/organizations are cultivated to maximize resources and evaluation efforts.
- Findings are shared with participants, staff, and the community to promote learning and growth in the field. Findings are translated back to the community in a language that will resonate and be understood.

## Going forward

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In going forward, preventionists and leaders in anti-sexual violence organizations may find it helpful to have conversations with their colleagues, community members, and partners to further their evaluation efforts. Here are questions to use as a springboard in those discussions:

- How do our prevention efforts align with the mission, values, and purpose of our organization? How is prevention a part of the strategic plan and direction of our organization? What specific changes are we trying to achieve as a result of our work?
- How do we already capture the impact of our efforts to prevent sexual violence? What data already exist? What stories of success are we hearing in our communities? What do we already know? What do we need to know? How would we use that information?
- What resources (funding, staffing, skills, partnerships) do we already have to support evaluation? Who in the community is invested

in sexual violence prevention and evaluation? How can we leverage those partnerships to strengthen our evaluation efforts?

The NSVRC is here to assist you in your evaluation efforts. Contact us at [resources@nsvrc.org](mailto:resources@nsvrc.org).



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