step 1

Focus the Evaluation

At the end of this module, you will be able to:

- ▲ Identify the purpose of your evaluation (Step 1a).
- ▲ Create a logic model to illustrate the linkages between program elements (Step 1b).
- ▲ Consult the individuals and groups who have a stake in the evaluation of your program (Step 1c).
- ▲ Determine the questions the evaluation will seek to answer (Step 1d).

The first step in evaluating any program is deciding the focus of the evaluation. This step lays the foundation for the remaining steps in the evaluation process. Step 1 of the *Tool Kit* will help you determine:

- why you are evaluating this particular program at this particular point in time;
- how the program is supposed to work, with whom, and why;
- who will be using the evaluation findings; and
- precisely what data about the program you need from the evaluation.

STEP 1a

Identifying the Purpose of the Evaluation

No program is ever evaluated just for the sake of being evaluated. There is always a specific reason, something that drives you to evaluate a particular program — or part of a program — at a particular point in time. It is important to identify the broad purpose of your evaluation up front before tackling the specific details of how you are going to do the evaluation. Otherwise, there is a danger of getting bogged down in the process of developing data collection tools, gathering data, analysing data, trying to interpret the data, thereby losing sight of the bigger picture.

There are many reasons to evaluate a program — to identify strengths and weaknesses, to share experiences, to measure progress, to improve implementation, to see what has been achieved so far, or to make decisions about which programs or aspects of a program should be continued or discontinued. In the *Purpose Statement* box, briefly explain in your own words why *you* are evaluating your program right now. There is a blank *Purpose Statement* in Appendix B.

EXAMPLE

Purpose Statement

To decide if the program should continue to be offered.

STEP 1 b

Creating a Logic Model

For most evaluations, it is important to have a clear description of the program to be evaluated. It will help you identify the critical questions for your evaluation. Sometimes a detailed description already exists. Often, however, programs — even those that have been around for a long time — have very little documentation about activities and expected outcomes. If that's your case, you are not alone. The *Tool Kit* will show you a tool for describing your program. It is called a program logic model.

This section will start off by giving you a bit of background on what a logic model is. Then you will be shown what a logic model looks like using the example of a health education program for parents. After that, you will be guided through the creation of a logic model for your own program.

What is a Logic Model?

Even though public health programs in Ontario are diverse, all share common elements. A logic model is a diagram of these common elements, showing what the program is supposed to do, with whom and why.

WHAT?

- **Components** are groups of closely-related activities in a program.
- **Activities** are the things the program does to work toward its desired outcomes.

WHO?

- **Target groups** are the individuals, groups or communities for whom the program's activities are designed.

WHY?

- **Outcomes** are the changes the program hopes to achieve. There are both **short-term** and **long-term** outcomes.

Try this to help you remember...

Components
Activities
Target Groups
Short-term
Outcomes
Long-term
Outcomes

There are many advantages to creating a logic model for your program. For evaluation purposes, a logic model can:

- summarise the key elements of your program (hopefully on a single piece of paper);
- explain the rationale behind program activities;
- show the cause-and-effect relationships between the activities and the outcomes — that is, which activities are expected to lead to which outcomes;
- help identify the critical questions for your evaluation; and
- provide the opportunity for stakeholders in the evaluation to discuss the program and agree upon its description.

Logic models are also a useful means of communicating the elements of your program to policy makers, staff, external funding agencies, the media and colleagues at other health units.

What Does a Logic Model Look Like? An Example

The logic model presented on the next page illustrates the basic elements of a parenting program. The You and Your Toddler Parenting Series has been offered throughout the Kennogaugh Falls Region for the past five years. It is designed for parents of children two to four years of age, especially those parents with a high school education or less. The series consists of six two-hour sessions facilitated by a public health nurse (PHN). Discussions include topics such as:

- taking care of a sick child;
- preparing healthy, balanced meals;
- communicating effectively;
- setting limits;
- talking about sexuality with toddlers;
- balancing work and family life; and
- building self-esteem in toddlers.

To recruit parents to the program, the PHNs:

- work with community resource centres and other organisations such as churches and libraries;
- advertise in grocery stores, shopping centers, pharmacies, etc.;
- write articles for community newspapers; and
- send letters to physicians to let them know about the program.

This recruitment activity is intended to increase awareness, knowledge and referrals to the program in order to increase participation in it.

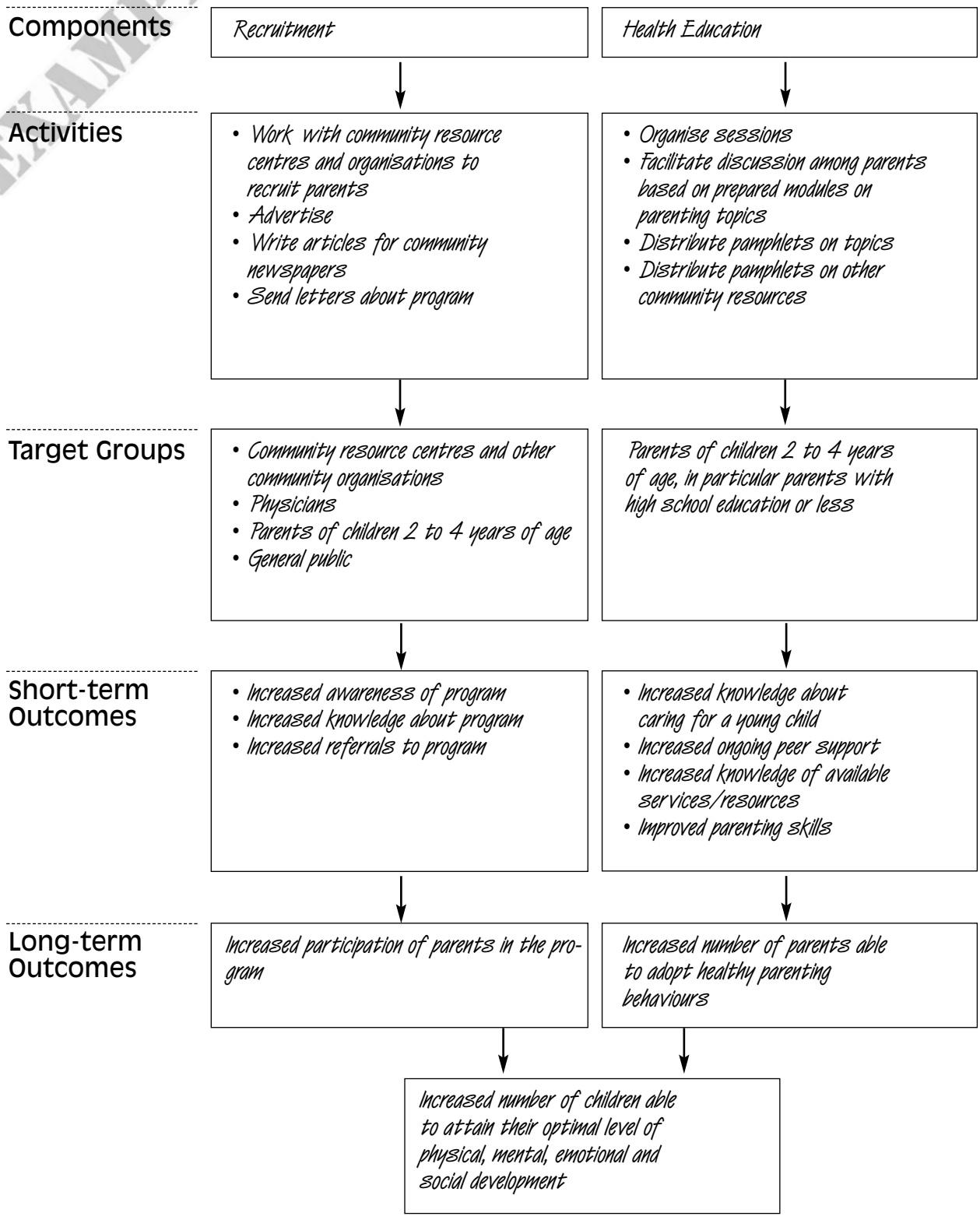
The sessions are offered at a variety of times and places throughout the week in churches and community centres throughout the region, in order to be available to as many parents as possible. Sessions are offered in English and French.

The series aims to:

- increase parents' knowledge about and skills in caring for their young children;
- inform parents about community resources; and
- help parents build an informal support network with other parents in the group.

Ultimately, it is hoped that this program will increase the number of parents able to adopt healthy parenting behaviours, thereby increasing the number of children able to attain their optimal level of physical, mental, emotional and social development.

Parenting Program Logic Model



Where to Start?

There is no single way to create a logic model. Where you start often depends on the developmental stage of the program.

An Existing Program

If your logic model is being developed to describe an existing program, start with the activities and progress downward — that is, a *top-down approach*. Ask yourself, "What is it that we do and why do we think that it will create the change we're hoping for?" This module will walk you through a top-down approach.

A New Program

If you are developing a logic model while planning a program, you may find it easier to start at the *bottom* of the model, beginning with the desired outcomes and *working your way up*. Ask yourself, "What is it that we want to change and how are we going to do it?"

Keep in mind that there is no "right" way to create a logic model — you may find that the easiest place to start is in the *middle*. You may even switch back and forth between approaches. Some people work across a page instead of up and down, starting with program components on the left and long-term outcomes on the far right. It really doesn't matter — the main point is to begin where it's easiest for you.

Who Should be Involved?

It is a good idea to get others to help you create a logic model. Consider working with program staff at all levels. They can help you review your model for accuracy and give you input and advice. Everyone should agree on the way the program is depicted in the logic model before proceeding with the evaluation.

How is a Logic Model Created?

First, fill in a *CAT Worksheet* for your program. There is a blank *Worksheet* in Appendix B. CAT is short for **C**omponents, **A**ctivities and **T**arget groups, the first three elements of a logic model. These elements are explained on the next page. There are also examples of words you might use to express these elements of your program. Once again, the *Worksheet* has been completed to evaluate the Parenting Program.

	Elements of the Logic Model	Examples
Components *Concentrate on themes or sets of activities.*	Components are closely-related groups of activities in your program. The number of components depends on the size of your program and how you conceptualise or administer it. For a large program, there could be several components in the logic model. Smaller programs, on the other hand, may consist of just one.	• advocacy • case management • clinical services • coalition building • community development • community mobilisation • contact management • emergency response • health communication • health education • monitoring • outbreak management • policy development • recruitment • screening • skill development • social marketing • surveillance • training
Activities *Don't include the administrative aspects of your program, such as payroll or performance appraisals.* *Use an action verb.*	Activities are the things the staff in your program do, or the services your program delivers. Activities are the means by which the desired outcomes will be achieved. To help think about activities, pull together all of the documentation that you have for the program. It may be a short paragraph describing the program's various activities, staff workplans or program operational plans.	• advertise • analyse • arrange • assess • assist • collect • conduct • consult • coordinate • counsel • create • deliver • develop • diagnose • display • distribute • draft • establish • facilitate • give • identify • immunise • inspect • interpret • lead • liaise • maintain • market • meet • monitor • notify • offer • operate • organise • prepare • prescribe • present • promote • provide • refer • represent • review • seek • set up • share • teach • train • write
Target Groups *Be as specific as possible by combining several characteristics.*	Target groups are the individuals, groups, organisations or communities for whom the program's services are designed. These are your program's priority populations, or its intended reach. Target groups can be specified in terms of sociodemographic characteristics (for example, age, income, occupation, education, sex, languages, ethnicity), health problems and behaviours, or anything else important in the context of the program.	• adults • anglophones • francophones • infants • men • parents of children aged 2 to 4 years • people living below the poverty line • people living in rural areas • politicians • seniors • smokers • women • youth

CAT Worksheet		
Components What are the main sets of activities?	**Activities** What things are done? What services are delivered?	**Target Groups** For whom are activities designed?
Health education	• *organise series* • *facilitate sessions*	• *parents of children 2 to 4 years, especially parents with high school education or less*
Recruitment	• *advertise in stores, libraries, churches, community resource centres and other public places*	• *general public* • *parents of children 2 to 4 years, especially parents with high school education or less*
	• *write articles for community newspapers*	• *general public* • *parents of children 2 to 4 years*
	• *send letters*	• *physicians* • *community resource centres* • *other community organisations*
Health education	• *distribute pamphlets on topics* • *distribute pamphlets on other community resources*	• *parents of children 2 to 4 years, especially parents with high school education or less*

Next, fill in the *SOLO Worksheet* for your program. There is a blank one in Appendix B. SOLO is short for **S**hort-term **O**utcomes and **L**ong-term **O**utcomes. Once again, the *Worksheet* has been completed for the Parenting Program.

Outcomes

Outcomes are the changes the program hopes to achieve with each target group. They are the reasons why you are doing your program. Outcomes are the intended results of the program, not the process of achieving them. There are both **short-term** and **long-term outcomes**. This distinction helps illustrate the sequential nature of change.

Short-term outcomes

Short-term outcomes are the direct results of the program on its participants. They show why the program activities will lead to long-term outcomes. In health promotion programs, short-term outcomes may be increased awareness or concern, increased knowledge, increased adoption of healthier attitudes, or improved skills. As a manager, you are accountable for the achievement of short-term outcomes.

Long-term outcomes

Long-term outcomes reflect the consequences of your program in the broader community. They tend to be the ultimate goals of the program, as listed in the Ontario Ministry of Health's Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines. Long-term outcomes sometimes take a long time to occur, but occasionally they are observed soon after a program is implemented — an example is an immunization program that reduces the rate of communicable disease. There will probably be only a few long-term outcomes for any given program. Long-term outcomes for public health programs can be improved behaviour, decreased morbidity or mortality, or improved health, for example.

Although it is essential to include the long-term outcomes of a program in the logic model, managers are rarely held accountable for their achievement because there are so many other forces that influence a program's target group. You can, however, assume that if short-term outcomes are achieved, then it is likely that long-term outcomes will follow. It is crucial that these assumptions are based on solid evidence.

For both short-term and long-term outcomes, be sure to include the direction of change (that is, increase or decrease), and what the program is trying to change. Although all public health programs aim to increase or decrease something, there may be different ways of expressing outcomes. Some examples are provided below.

- alleviated
- augmented
- decreased
- diminished
- eliminated
- enlarged
- expanded
- extended
- improved
- increased
- lessened
- lowered
- prevented
- shortened
- reduced
- raised

EXAMPLE

SOLO Worksheet			
What is the *direction* of change (↑ or ↓)?	**What is the program intending to change?**	**Is it short-term or long-term?**	**Which components contribute to this outcome?**
increased	*awareness of the program*	*S*	*recruitment*
increased	*knowledge about the program*	*S*	*recruitment*
increased	*referrals to the program*	*S*	*recruitment*
increased	*knowledge about caring for a young child*	*S*	*health education*
increased	*participation in the program*	*L*	*recruitment*
increased	*number of parents able to adopt healthy parenting behaviours*	*L*	*health education*
increased	*ongoing peer support*	*S*	*health education*
increased	*knowledge of resources*	*S*	*health education*
improved	*parenting skills*	*S*	*health education*
increased	*number of children able to attain their optimal level of physical, mental, emotional and social development*	*L*	*health education*

Once both the *CAT* and *SOLO Worksheets* are complete, you are ready to start putting all of the program elements together into a logic model.

At the top of a blank piece of paper, write the name of your program.

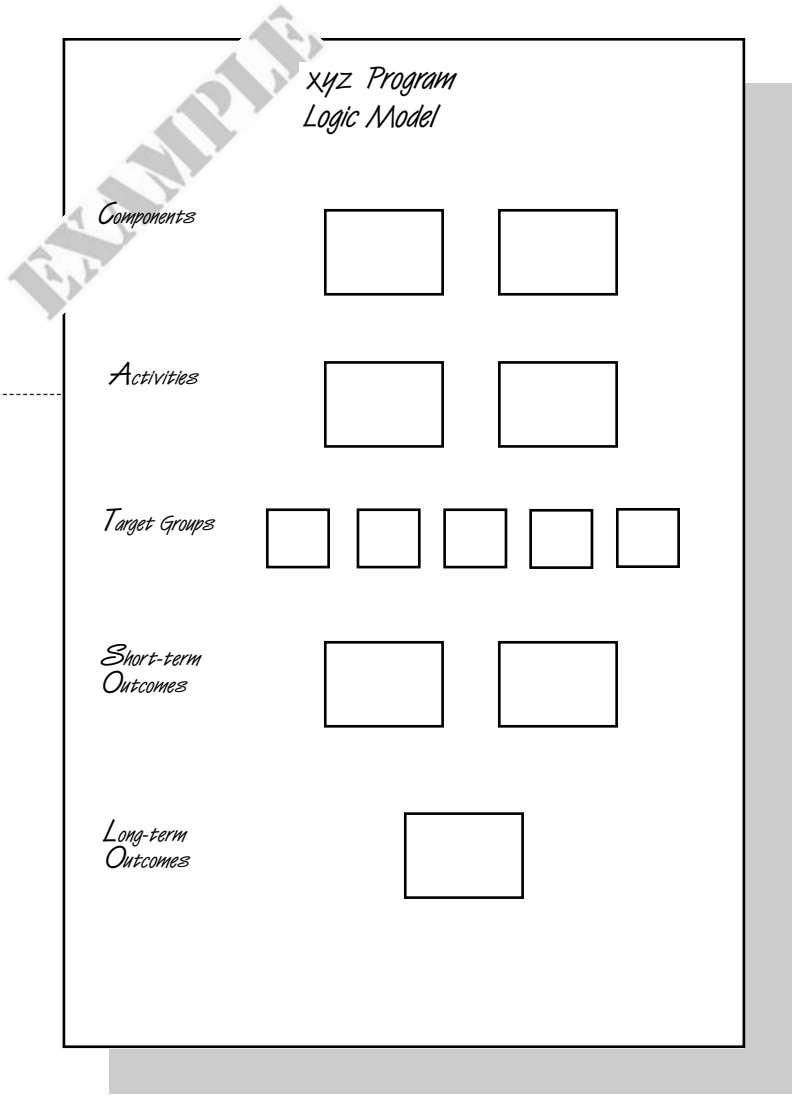
Write each of the components identified in the first column of the *CAT Worksheet* side-by-side. Draw a box around each one of them. Label these boxes "components."

Below each box of components, draw another box. In each box, write the activities listed in the second column of the *CAT Worksheet* that correspond to the component above it. Label these boxes "activities."

Below each of these, write each target group listed in the third column of the *CAT Worksheet*. Even if the target group is listed more than once on the *Worksheet*, write it only once on your logic model. Label these boxes "target groups."

Underneath these, write all of the short-term outcomes from the *SOLO Worksheet* that are from the specific component. Put a box around each outcome. Label these boxes "short-term outcomes."

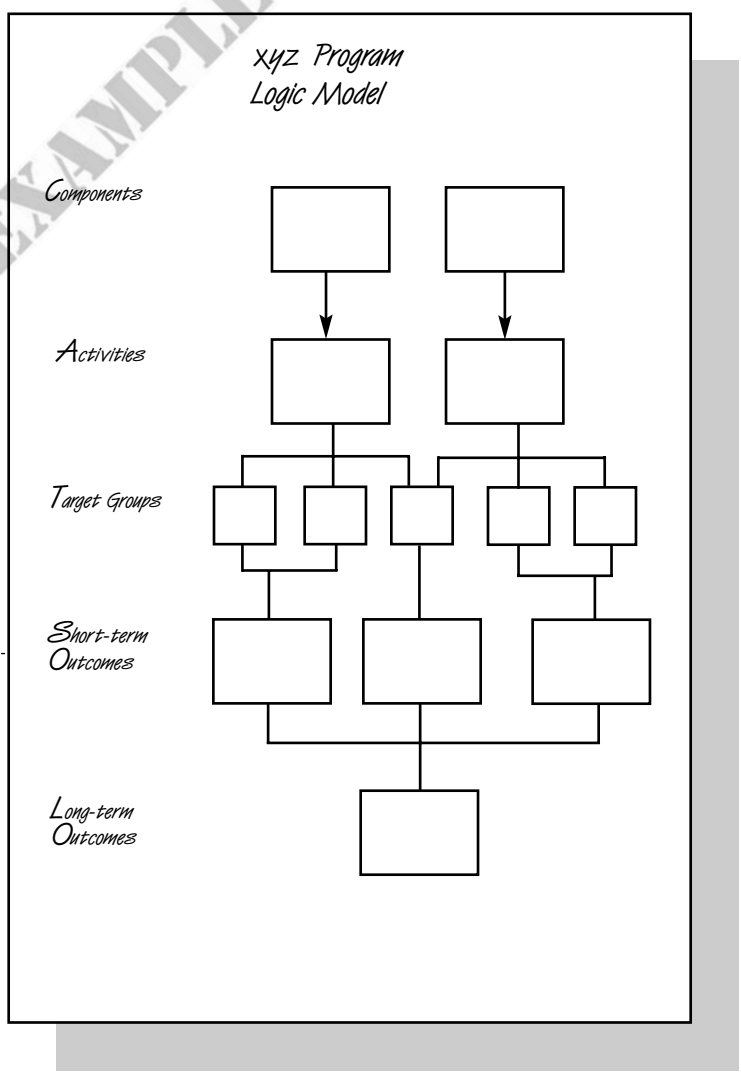
Next write the long-term outcomes from the *SOLO Worksheet* below the short-term outcomes to which they relate. Put a box around each outcome. Label these boxes "long-term outcomes."



This is just an example. You may not have the same number of boxes in your logic model.

Lines and/or arrows in a logic model demonstrate the cause-and-effect relationship between activities and outcomes. This represents the sequence or chain of events in your program, or in other words, the logic or theory behind it. The next step is to draw lines to show these causal relationships between the elements in your logic model.

First, draw a line from each component to the corresponding box(es) of activities. Then draw a line linking the activities to the target groups for which the activities are designed. Next, draw a line linking each target group to the short-term outcomes the target group should achieve. Finally, draw a line between each short-term outcome and the long-term outcomes to which they will contribute.



Now check that each of the components will lead to one or more outcomes through the activities and target groups. Also, make sure you identify and remove anything that is mentioned more than once. Before moving on to the next step, review the elements to see if you have left out any aspects of your program. If you have, add them in the right spot.

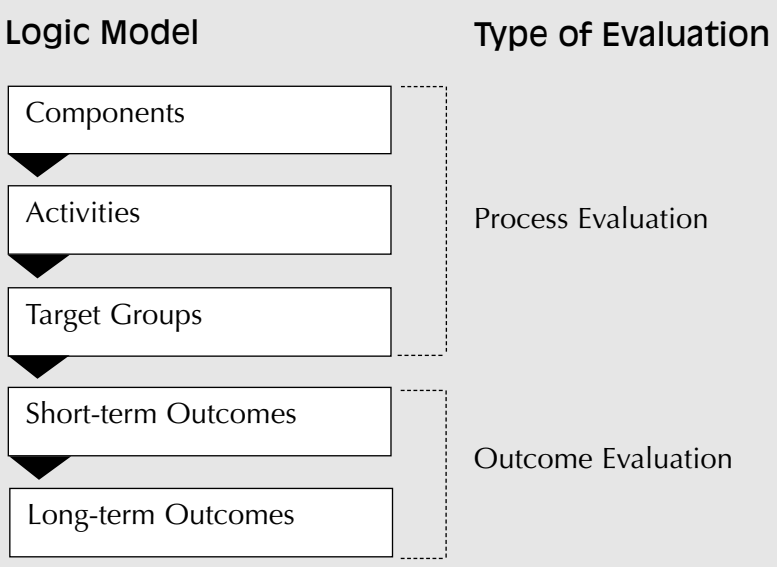
Remember, a logic model is supposed to demonstrate the logic behind your program. The final step in developing a logic model is to check this logic. Ask yourself: "Is it reasonable to expect that the program's activities will actually lead to both the program's short-term and long-term outcomes?" **If your answer is not a definite YES, do not proceed with the evaluation of your program at this point in time. You need to enter a planning phase to rethink the program.** Consult your health unit evaluation specialist or epidemiologist.

Logic Model Tips

- Practice makes perfect! The first time is always the hardest... it will get easier!
- Concentrate on how the program is currently being implemented (not how it was planned, or how it was implemented last year).
- Discuss the logic model with staff involved at all levels in the program.
- To get started, be sure to look at any available documentation and files — budgets, workplans, strategic and operational plans, manuals, training materials, organizational charts, statements of goals and objectives, previous evaluation reports, committee reports, etc.
- If you're finding this too difficult, it may be because your program is complex. Ask a colleague in another program or call in an outside facilitator to help you get started.
- Strive for simplicity and don't be over-inclusive in your logic model. Don't include all of the implementation details. Try to fit the whole logic model on one page. Remember — you'll want to use the logic model to describe the program to others. Append to the logic model any additional details about the program that you think might be useful.

Theory-on-the-Side: Relating the Logic Model to Types of Evaluation

An evaluation that focuses on a program's components, activities and target groups is often called **process evaluation**. Evaluation focusing on short-term and/or long-term outcomes is often called **outcome evaluation**.



STEP 1c

Consulting with Stakeholders

Now that you have completed the logic model for your program, the next step is to consult stakeholders. These are the individuals or groups who have an interest in the program's evaluation. Some stakeholders are internal to your organisation; some may be external.

Ask yourself: "Who will be using the information from the evaluation?" Check them off in the *Stakeholder Checklist*. There is a blank *Checklist* in Appendix B. Add any others who are missing to the *Checklist*. Try not to serve too many individuals or groups at once. For your evaluation to be credible and useful, it must be focused on serving the information needs of a few key users.

In the evaluation of the Parenting Program, introduced as an example in Step 1b, the stakeholders who were interested in the results of the evaluation were the Medical Officer of Health, the program manager, the program staff and the community resource centres where several series were held.

Stakeholder Checklist

Internal

- ☑ program manager
- ☑ program staff
- ❑ planners
- ☑ Medical Officer of Health
- ❑ other senior managers in the health unit
- ❑ other

External

- ☑ partners in planning or delivering the program
- ❑ Board of Health
- ❑ Ministry of Health
- ❑ other funding agencies
- ❑ accreditation body
- ❑ program participants
- ❑ community members or groups
- ❑ program volunteers
- ❑ organisations offering similar programs
- ❑ other

STEP 1 d

Determining the Evaluation Questions

The next step is to determine the questions your evaluation will seek to answer. These questions are called evaluation questions. Evaluation questions are very specific, but not as detailed as those you might ask an individual on a survey or in an interview. Some examples are provided below.

	Different Types of Questions Asked During the Evaluation Process	*Examples*
Broad ↓ Specific	Purpose of evaluation (Step 1a)	• How can this program be improved? • Is this program worth continuing?
	Evaluation question (Step 1d)	• How do the program activities vary from site to site? • Have the program's short-term outcomes been achieved?
	Question on a questionnaire (Step 3)	• Were the sessions you attended offered at a convenient time? • On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all useful and 5 is extremely useful, how would you rate the usefulness of the information you received?

Considering Possible Questions

The *Evaluation Questions Checklist* contains some of the questions an evaluation might address. Each box corresponds to elements in your logic model — activities, target groups, and outcomes (both short-term and long-term). Look at your logic model to help focus on possible evaluation questions.

For each question, indicate whether it is a high- or low-priority evaluation question for you as program manager, and then for internal and external stakeholders. Start with the box on activities, move to target groups, and finish off with outcomes (i.e., move top to bottom). Put an "H" for high or an "L" for low in the column corresponding to the stakeholder group. If the question listed is not a priority right now, just leave it blank. A high-priority question is one that absolutely must be answered as soon as possible to support immediate decision-making needs. A low-priority question is something that would be "nice to know," but no one actually needs to know, the answer right now.

These lists contain some of the most frequently asked questions about public health programs, but you may have additional information needs. List in the appropriate box any other questions that you or other stakeholders need answers to.

Choosing Priority Questions

Circle the questions that are a high priority for you as manager and at least one other stakeholder group (either internal or external). The circled questions will be the ones your evaluation will strive to answer. Put the other evaluation questions aside for now.

Take another look at the circled questions. Are you sure that these are *high-priority* questions? Be selective. There won't be enough time or money to answer every question. As a guideline, the evaluation of an average-sized program should have about five to eight evaluation questions.

Checking that Questions are Good Evaluation Questions

Asking a question seems like a straight-forward and simple process. It is a form of communication that we learn almost from the day we learn to speak. Nonetheless, understanding how a question is structured will help you ensure that you ask good evaluation questions.

A question is a sentence which demands an action: it seeks a response. A statement, on the other hand, does not demand any action. To ensure you ask a question, open with "what," "why," "how often," "when," "where," or "who."

Every question consists of a stem and a topic. The stem is the part of the question that demands a response; it is the action part of the sentence. The topic is what the question is about. Simple questions consist of one stem and one topic. If any of the items that you added to the lists are circled, make sure they are phrased as questions, not statements — each one should have a stem and a topic.

Evaluation Questions Checklist

Who needs to know?

H = High Priority L = Low Priority

	Manager of Program	Other Stakeholders	
		Internal	External
Activities			
Were activities implemented as planned? (how often, when, where, duration)	H	H	H
How did the activities vary from one site to another?	L		
Were required resources in place and sufficient?			
Did staff think they were well prepared to implement the activities?	H	H	L
Did staff think they were able to implement the activities as planned? If not, what factors limited their implementation?			
Did staff and community partners think the partnership was positive?			
Did community partners think the activities were implemented as planned?			
What activities worked well? What activities did not work so well?			
What was the cost of delivering the activities?			
Target Groups			
How many people were reached?			
Did the program reach the intended target group?	H	H	H
To what extent did activities reach people outside the target group?	L		L
What proportion of people in need were reached?			H
Were potential participants (non-participants) aware of the program?	L		
Were participants satisfied with the program?	H		H
Does the program have a good reputation?			
How did participants find out about the program?	H		H
How many people participated in the program?	H	H	H
Outcomes			
Have the short-term outcomes been achieved? (List the short-term outcomes of the program from the logic model.)			
Knowledge about parenting	H	H	H
Parenting skills (including communication)	H	H	H
Have the long-term outcomes been achieved? (List the long-term outcomes of the program from the logic model.)			

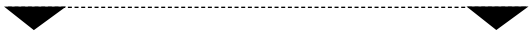
Think about which activities contribute the most towards the program's outcomes. Are there any activities you are particularly concerned about?

Think about who the program is designed for. What do you need to know about who you are reaching and who you are not?

Think about which outcomes are most crucial. Which outcomes are the most difficult to achieve?

Consider, for example, the following evaluation question:

Who attends the parenting sessions?



"Who" is the stem and "parenting sessions" is the topic

Checking the Feasibility of the Evaluation Questions

Apply the **SMART** principle to each of your priority evaluation questions (the ones that are circled) to make sure they are feasible.

SMART

Specific — Is the question specific? Is it clear? Is there a stem and a topic for each question?

Measurable — Will you be able to answer the question?

Actionable — Will the answers to the evaluation questions provide you with the information you need to make decisions about your program?

Relevant — Are there any questions that you can identify as simply "nice to know" as opposed to "need to know." For each question, you should be able to name who needs the information, and clearly define why they need it and/or what they will be able to do with it.

Timely — Is it important to ask this question now?

If you answer "no" to any of the above questions, try to make revisions so your questions pass the SMART test. If you are having trouble, consult an evaluation specialist. If the revised question still fails the SMART check, eliminate that question and move on to Step 2 with your other evaluation questions.

Key Points

- A clear program description is an important part of any evaluation.
- The logic model is a useful tool for describing programs.
- There are five basic elements in any program: components; activities; target groups; short-term outcomes; and long-term outcomes.
- Consulting with stakeholders is an important aspect of focusing an evaluation.
- The evaluation questions depend on decision-making needs and flow directly out of the program logic model.
- There are many commonly asked evaluation questions but there may also be some unique to your particular program.
- The evaluation cannot be all things to all people. It is crucial to limit the evaluation questions to high-priority issues only.

Quiz Yourself

- ▲ Describe the five basic elements of a program.
- ▲ List the advantages of creating a logic model to describe your program.
- ▲ Explain when you might use a bottom-up approach to constructing a logic model.
- ▲ Identify those words below that express activities and those that express outcomes:
  - Provide
  - Improved
  - Facilitate
  - Counsel
  - Decreased
  - Teach
  - Reduced
- ▲ List two types of internal stakeholders and two types of external stakeholders.

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