



# Evaluating Physical Activity Initiatives targeting Mothers and their Families



Evaluation is a practical management tool that enables organizations or groups to learn from experience. It is not an add-on to an initiative but a necessary component to measure success, allowing you to improve and adapt programs and services when designing and delivering future initiatives.

## Designing Your Evaluation Plan

### Step 1: Develop a Business Case to Outline Exactly What You Want to Do and Why.

As part of developing your business case you need to collect information on existing physical activity programs, services and environments in your community that either currently serve or could serve mothers and their families. This audit of the current situation is a form of evaluation that serves as an evidence-based first step to inform what you want to do. Consulting with mothers is another component that builds your case. This consultation allows you to determine what the problems are and what needs to change. It can be done through focus groups, community consultations or surveys/questionnaires.

### Step 2: Develop Goals and Objectives

Goals are the broad statements of what you hope to accomplish. They are specific but not easy to measure such as increasing physical activity among working mothers in your community. Objectives on the other hand are the specific activities required to achieve the goals. They are operational and very measurable. Objectives serve as the basis for the evaluation of your initiative.

### Step 3: Determine Project Activities

Out of each objective, specific activities will be developed that form the day to day work plan for the initiative. Reporting on the progress of each activity (project management) is an ongoing form of evaluation.

### Step 4: Determine How You Will Collect Evaluation Data

With the goals, objectives and activities in place, it is important to determine how data will be collected and what tools will be needed. These suggested tools will help provide you with information. Since no one tool will give you everything you need, collect data using multiple tools.

**Activity logs:** Track regular activities and provide a running account of what happened. They can provide anecdotal information that is not usually captured in more formal surveys or consultations. Keeping an activity log is a great tool to assist in writing reports, providing regular updates on initiatives and providing valuable qualitative data to evaluations.

**Surveys:** Surveys consist of a series of closed- or open-ended questions. They can be done by hand, online, over the telephone, through email or face-to-face. Although surveys are easy to administer, developing questions that are easy to understand and measure can be difficult. Plan to test out survey questions on colleagues and members of your target audience ahead of time so you can modify accordingly.

**Interviews:** An interview is a conversation between two or more people where questions are asked by the interviewer to obtain information from the interviewee. Interviews can be done over the telephone, on the radio, TV, website, email or face-to-face.

**Focus Groups:** Focus groups provide opportunities for in-depth consultation. Traditionally they consist of between six to ten participants with a particular interest, involvement or stake in the subject being discussed. During focus groups, a facilitator leads the group through a set of questions with a recorder summarizing the discussion.

**Community Consultations:** Community consultations bring together interested people for information and discussion of an issue. They are open to the public and can attract either a small or large group based on the level of interest in the issue being discussed. During community consultations, presentations are given followed by a facilitated discussion.

**Audits:** Audits assess an organization, system, process, project or product. They can consist of simple inventories (e.g. how many parks and arenas are in a community) or be more involved such as the assessment of how many mothers are involved in mother & baby aquacise programs. Audits are performed at the beginning of an initiative to serve as a baseline for future measurement. By doing this you are able to track changes, modify activities and determine the impact of initiatives.

### Step 5: Determine Data Sources

Once you have decided how you are going to collect the information, you need to determine where the information will come from. It is important that the sources used are considered credible by your stakeholders. Traditionally, sources of data include people, documents, observations, or existing data sources. To increase validity, collect data from multiple sources to make comparisons.

### Step 6: Interpreting Results and Writing Reports

After you have collected your data, you need to summarize and compare it in relation to your objectives and results. This is an easy way to connect evaluation results to overall outcomes. In addition to providing the data you collected, it is important to provide observations such as whether your results were what you expected, any problems or challenges encountered and the strengths and limitations of the data collection methods used. This will be very helpful for those reading the report and for anyone interested in replicating what you did.

## Involving Mothers

- Regularly ask for their feedback.
- Involve them as evaluators, interviewers, and auditors.
- Share evaluation results and work together to develop next steps.

## Helpful Tools

Splash and Ripple: Using Outcomes to Design and Guide Community Work [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/pubs/\\_contribution/ripple-ricochet/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/pubs/_contribution/ripple-ricochet/index-eng.php)

Physical Activity Evaluation Handbook (US Centres for Disease Control) [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/handbook/pdf/handbook.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/handbook/pdf/handbook.pdf)

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**Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) Tel: 613-562-5667**

For more information on CAAWS' *Mothers in Motion* project, please contact [caaws@caaws.ca](mailto:caaws@caaws.ca) or visit the website at [www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/e/](http://www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/e/).

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Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity

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