5.j. Recipient Activity j: Project Evaluation

Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of this project and use lessons learned to guide/modify the applicant's plan for establishing an environmental public health tracking (surveillance) network. Refer to the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report titled "Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health" (See Appendix II for website).

5.j.1. Results and Accomplishments

Overview: Preliminary Evaluation Report

This preliminary report provides an overview of the formative and summative evaluation processes that we engaged in over the last three years to accomplish the goal highlighted above.

It describes the process used to develop and implement the evaluation plan which is based on the "Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health" issued by the Center's of Disease Control (CDC). The steps of the CDC Evaluation Framework specifically addressed within this report include:

- Engaging stakeholders.
- Focusing the evaluation design.
- Gathering creditable evidence.
- Determining findings.

Selma Abinader and Associates, an independent consulting firm, is conducting the evaluation. A final evaluation report containing summative evaluation findings and recommendations will be available by January 2006.

Glossary of Evaluation Terms

EVALUATION: Systematic collection and use of program information for multiple purposes

FORMATIVE EVALUATION: Evaluation that is designed to collect information that can be used for continuous program improvement

IMPACTS: Usually used to refer to long-term program outcomes

INPUT: Resources available to the program, including money, staff time, volunteer time, etc.

LOGIC MODEL: A flowchart or graphic display representing the logical connections between program activities and program goals

OUTPUT: The immediate products or activities of a program

OUTCOME: Ways in which the participants of a program could be expected to change at the conclusion of the program

PROCESS EVALUATION: Evaluation that is designed to document what programs actually do: program activities, participants, resources, and other outputs

STAKEHOLDERS: Those persons with an interest in the program and its evaluation (e.g. participants, funders, managers, community members, etc.)

SUMMATIVE EVALUATION: Evaluation that is designed to collect information about whether a program is effective in creating intended outcomes

Engaging Stakeholders

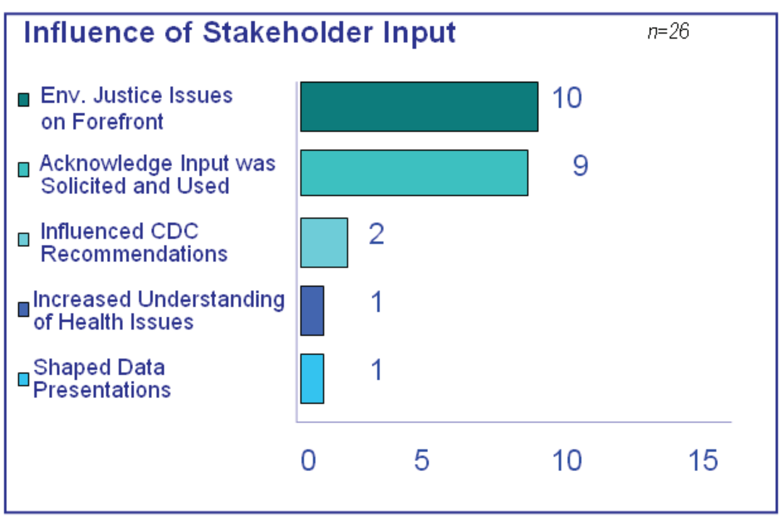
Our program structure and activities illustrate a deep commitment to fostering the input and participation of stakeholders in every aspect of the program planning and evaluation process. As illustrated below, over 200 stakeholders shared their perspectives and helped to shape the evaluation focus and design through participation in one or more of the program activities listed below as well as other collaborative efforts such as the Mini-Grant process, Environmental Health Data Workshop, and SB702 Expert Working Group.

Activity	Number of Stakeholders
• Planning Consortium	92
• Needs Assessment Respondents	59
• Needs Assessment and Outreach Workgroup	10
• Alameda County Pilot Project Advisory Group Member	79
• Technical Consultants	27
• Needs Assessment Focus Group	63

Using these forums as a means of soliciting both direct and indirect evaluation input is supported by the preliminary evaluation findings of the 26 key informant interviews conducted as part of the Summative Evaluation effort. These respondents represent members of the various groups listed above.

Respondents to a Planning Consortium Mini-Survey conducted in September 2005 and the key informant interviews conducted as part of the Summative Evaluation consistently praised CEHTP staff for their openness to engaging with stakeholders.

Figure 13: Influence of Stakeholder Input



Note: 3 of the 26 respondents did not feel their input influenced program activities.

Figure 13 shows that stakeholders are confident that their input is heard and does influence program activities and outcomes. Only three of the 26 respondents did not feel that their input was taken into account for varying reasons.

The following quote from one of the key informants aptly reflects the comments shared by many of the Mini-Survey and Key Informant Interview respondents.

"The process brought together diverse stakeholders and had very open discussions with a variety of opinions -- input helped shape the direction of this process and create the potential for a state-wide program."

Evaluation Design and Focus

The Evaluation Team took the lead in developing the evaluation design, evaluation questions, methods and indicators. Members of the Evaluation Team include Environmental Health Tracking Branch staff members, other California Department of Health Services staff (CDHS), and representatives from Cal/EPA, UC Berkeley Academic Partner for Excellence, Planning Consortium Community Co-Chair and others. These members represent the perspectives of the diverse multi-stakeholder groups listed above.

The first step in the evaluation process was the development of the Logic Model. Early in the program we tried to solidify how the various program components would work together to reach the intended outcomes. At a staff retreat in December 2003, we determined a vision for our program and mapped out the program Logic Model indicating inputs, outputs, and short, medium and long-term outcomes. The Logic Model helped us to conceptualize the interconnectedness of the program activities and laid the groundwork for determining the focus of the evaluation effort.

We continued to refine the Logic Model, which was presented at the first meeting of the Evaluation Team in July 2004. Once oriented to the Logic Model, the Evaluation Team agreed that the evaluation would focus on program elements most likely to have the strongest effect on program outcomes and which were feasible to evaluate. They felt that the *Measures of Effectiveness* articulated in the initial CDC proposal were focused more on process rather than impact, and that these measures would be adequately reported on through the quarterly reports to CDC.

Besides these measures, the Evaluation Team was interested in understanding the following;

Relationships and Capacity (Context)

- What aspects of our situation most shaped our ability to do the work we set out to do?

Quality and Quantity (Implementation)

- What did our program accomplish?

- What is our assessment of the results of our work?

Effectiveness, Magnitude, and Satisfaction (Outcomes)

- What is our assessment of the results of our work?
- What have we learned about doing this kind of work?

The Evaluation Team generated an initial set of evaluation questions that went through several reviews by both the Team itself and program staff before the Team reconvened in March 2005. At the meeting, members once again reviewed the revised Logic Model and evaluation questions, methods, and indicators generated during the review process (see APPENDIX R: Evaluation Materials).

The evaluation methods discussed and endorsed by the Evaluation Team included: conducting web-based surveys, key informant interviews, focus groups, and record reviews as the main sources for generating evaluation data. Key informants included program staff, California Department of Health Services (CDHS) leadership and partners/collaborators. Survey respondents included members of the Planning Consortium (PC), Alameda County Pilot Project Advisory Group (AG), the Needs Assessment and Outreach Workgroup, and Technical Consultants (TC). The Evaluation Team also provided direction on the timeline for conducting the evaluation activities, including the review of the questions by the Planning Consortium.

Gather Credible Evidence: Summative and Formative Evaluation Processes

Formative Evaluation Processes

We continually monitored the program's progress and effectiveness through the following formative evaluation methods:

- Meeting Evaluations.
- Staff Retreats.
- Meetings with Key Stakeholder Groups.
- Web-based Planning Consortium Mini-Survey.
- Needs Assessment.
- Staff Outreach.

MEETING EVALUATIONS AND MEETING PROCESSES

Meeting participants were asked for verbal and written feedback on the meeting process and outcomes after each meeting. The evaluation results were discussed at meeting debriefing sessions and adjustments were made in the meeting process and/or program efforts to reflect these results.

Meetings were structured to include activities designed to solicit stakeholder input. For example, at Planning Consortium Meeting #4, members engaged in small and large group activities to identify what was needed to ensure our program's success and relevancy to stakeholders. The results helped to:

- Identify key strategic issues and guidelines/protocols for facilitating our responsiveness to communities and effectiveness in working with partners.
- Develop consensus on who and how these guidelines/protocols were to be developed and consensus on the resulting products.
- Create an action agenda to direct the focus and structure of future meetings.

The meeting results also are incorporated into this report and included in APPENDIX K: Planning Consortium Materials.

In January 2004 we also conducted a mid-project "check-in" with Planning Consortium members through phone interviews. The findings were summarized for planning future meetings and for Planning Consortium evaluation purposes. The findings that helped shape future agendas included the need to:

- Modify agendas and the meeting length and frequency (more frequent but shorter meetings).
- Develop a clear meeting work plan.
- Create agenda based on interaction and input.
- Emphasize concrete products.
- Keep Planning Consortium members up to date on activities, progress, and findings.

STAFF RETREATS

Staff retreats held on December 2003 and in September 2004 provided opportunities for staff to reflect on and assess program progress and determine key issues and strategies for moving forward.

For example, when designing the logic model at the first staff retreat in December 2003, it became clear that the technical staff were not well integrated into the overall program, that increased technical capacity was needed, and that administrative workload demands were difficult to manage. As a result, the need for increase in technical staff capacity was highlighted and addressed along with strategies for addressing the administrative staff workload.

At the second staff retreat held in September 2004, staff members participated in an activity that assessed the effectiveness and functioning of the program structure. Results of their assessment indicated that the program structure was working well for the most part, that there was a good distribution of duties, and that staff were satisfied with their roles and responsibilities on the whole. Strong staff cohesiveness and high level of job satisfaction was also highlighted.

MEETINGS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Special meetings of specific groups of stakeholders were convened as needed to engage in
Special meetings of specific groups of stakeholders were convened as needed to engage in
strategic decision making sessions. For example, In September 2004, program collaborators, policy analysts, CDHS and Cal/EPA key leadership and others came together to discuss strategies for moving the Tracking agenda progressively forward and ensuring sustainability of the Tracking efforts over time.

WEB-BASED PLANNING CONSORTIUM MINI-SURVEY

Eight new Environmental Justice advocates joined Meeting #6 of the Planning Consortium. The advocacy agenda put forth by these members began to shift the focus of the meeting agenda from a more technical discussion to more of an Environmental Justice focus and forum. Throughout this shift, we remained committed to integrating Environmental Justice principles and maintaining the Planning Consortium as an open forum where both community and technical expertise are valued and relevant to the process.

Member feedback was solicited through a web-based survey through which members shared their perspectives on the Planning Consortium's functioning and effectiveness. The survey results were presented to the group at Meeting #9 (October 2005). Strategies for enhancing Planning Consortium effectiveness are currently being developed with individual member input and a small working group.

The results of this mini survey will be incorporated and presented as part of the final evaluation report.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

During Phase One of the Needs Assessment, survey questionnaires were distributed to NGO's and Local Public Health Agencies (LPHAs) throughout the state. Fifty-nine surveys were returned, including 29 from NGOs and 30 from LPHA. The survey results documented the needs, capacity, resources, gaps, barriers, issues, and properties of these groups as they relate to environmental health tracking.

During Phase Two, we conducted seven small group discussions with representatives of NGOs and LPHAs; 63 individuals participated overall. These discussions obtained detailed information about data/information needs and organizational/workforce capacity. In addition, key informant interviews were conducted with eight California Tribal representatives.

The results of the survey, focus groups, and key informant interviews have already informed and shaped our approaches and activities during the development stages of an EPHTN. Ultimately, findings from the needs assessment will be used to inform the Strategic Plan for environmental health tracking in California. This includes community outreach and involvement strategies, data and information communication and dissemination strategies, data analysis and interpretation methods and priorities, and technical specifications for an EPHTN.

A few specific examples of current program activities shaped by the Needs Assessment are as follows:

- Our mini-grants scope and focus
- Outreach and education materials such as the newsletter. Examples include a compendium of data sources: http://www.catracking.com/resources/nl/Winter2003.htm#data and a compendium of resources for community action and public health practice: http://www.catracking.com/resources/nl/spring2005.htm#02.
- Other components and strategies for the needs assessment. For example, the need to focus on Tribes and the need to conduct face-to-face meetings and discussions.
- Information and materials for the Environmental Health Data Workshop for EJ Organizations.

STAFF OUTREACH

The web based Planning Consortium Mini-Survey results indicated high marks both for staff reaching out to affected communities and for their responsiveness overall. Examples noted by respondents highlighted times when staff visited community sites, conducted outreach to community groups, provided technical assistance to community programs and state and local agencies, conducted presentations, and remained accessible and responsive to stakeholder groups.

Summative Evaluation Process

The Evaluation Team laid the groundwork for conducting the summative evaluation process by determining evaluation focus, questions, methodology, indicators, and survey groups. The vehicles for collecting evaluation data initially included:

- Web-based surveys targeted to members of the PC, AG, and technical consultants to our IT/GIS activities (TC).
- Key informant interviews with program partners and staff
- A Review of program records including: meeting minutes and meeting evaluation forms, CDC Progress Reports, Needs Assessment Reports, group membership rosters and attendance data, evaluations of Mini-Grant recipients, and other program materials

The consultant drafted key informant surveys to solicit input from the following groups for staff and stakeholder review:

- Planning Consortium Members
- Alameda Pilot Project Advisory Group
- Technical Consultants
- Partner/Collaborators

- Program Staff

APPENDIX R: Evaluation Materials includes questions used in conducting interviews with the PC, AG, and TC informants respectively. Questions asked to partners/collaborators, Alameda County Pilot Project Advisory Groups and program staff are not included in this report, but will be included in the final report.

The consultant issued a request for volunteers from the Planning Consortium to review the surveys. Only two members indicated interest in part due to conflicts. One main conflict was that the request went out at a time when key stakeholders were involved in reviewing the recommendations for the CDC report and providing input on the Needs Assessment Report and Outreach and Education Plan. Involvement in these activities prohibited several members from spending additional time and resources to reviewing the surveys.

Several factors also came into play that supported conducting key informant interviews rather than a web based survey:

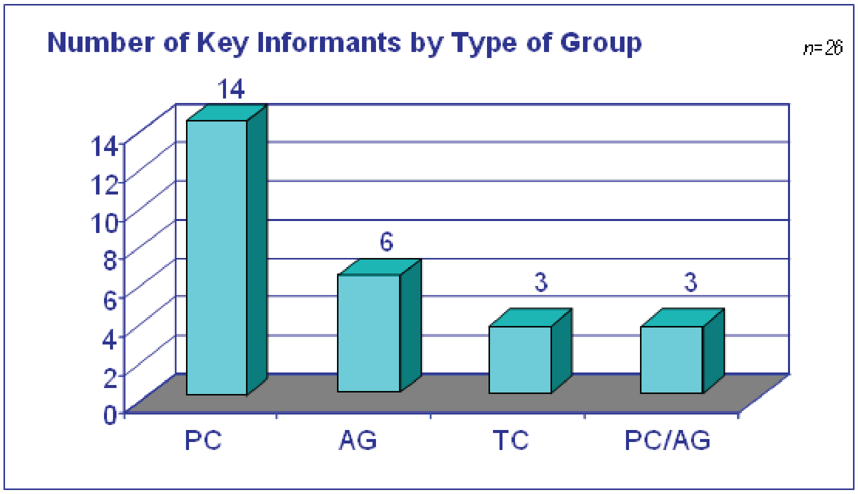
- Web based Mini-Survey yielded only 19 responses from the 77 requests issued to PC members
- The Mini-Survey contained far fewer questions than the summative evaluation survey, which had raised concern about the number of members willing to complete an even longer survey.
- We wanted to ensure that a variety of viewpoints were solicited and that all aspects of the program were addressed in the evaluation
- The shortened timeframe for the development of the final report did not allow adequate time to get the survey online and responses back and analyzed in a timely manner.

Once it was decided that key informant interviews would be conducted rather than a web-based survey, program staff worked with the consultant to identify lists of key informants in each of the stakeholder groups referenced above. All PC members were notified of the option to participate as a key informant at the October PC meeting and in a follow up email.

Potential informants were contacted through email with follow up phones calls throughout October. Interviews were conducted over a three-week period. Both daytime and evening interview times were offered along with the option to fill in the survey and submit it by email or hard copy. Program records were provided to the consultant and the evaluation plan and timeline were revised to reflect changes in evaluation activities.

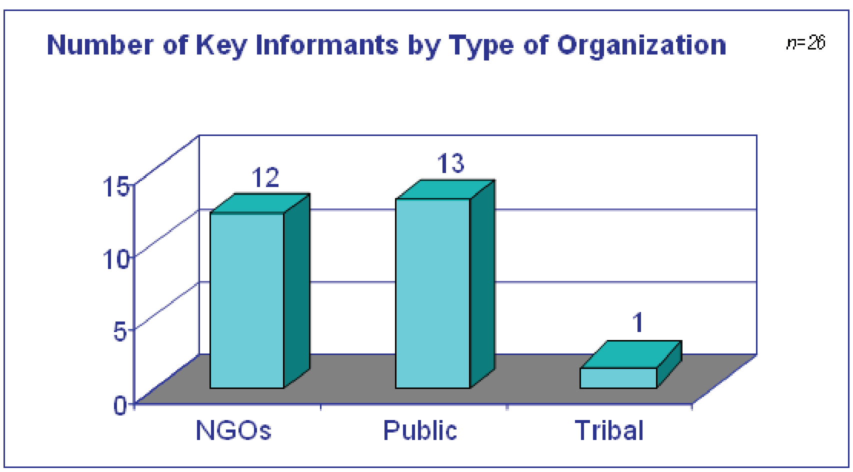
The 26 key informant interviews break down by type of group as follows. Note that the staff members who also participated in staff key informant interviews are not included in these numbers.

Figure 14: Number of Key Informants by Type of Advisory Body



The numbers of informants interviewed within each group can be loosely correlated to the total number of stakeholders involved in that activity. The PC/AG informants were stakeholders that participated in both the Planning Consortium and the Advisory Group. TC represents the Technical Consultants to the GIS/Architectural Activities. The involvement of informants in other key program activities was taken into consideration when determining the informant's level of involvement illustrated in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Number of Key Informants by Type of Organization

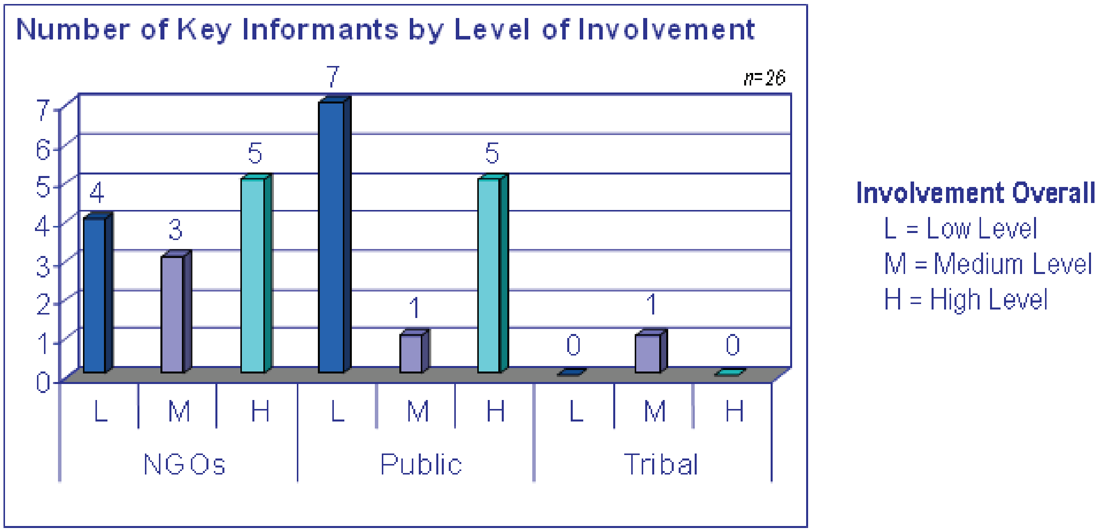


NGOs include community members, Community Based Organizations, Advocacy Groups, and other agencies. Public refers to programs that are entities of the Federal, State, or Local Government Agencies. Only one Tribal representative has been interviewed thus far. Efforts will be made to solicit additional Tribal input to incorporate into the Final Evaluation Report.

The number of informants by Type of Group (Figure 14) and Type of Organization (Figure 15) reflect the total number of key informants that were asked all or some of the questions found on the attached survey tools (see APPENDIX R: Evaluation Materials). The total respondents for questions that are specific to a particular group will be reflected as such, rather than to the number of evaluation informants overall.

The analysis of data from the PC Web-Based Mini-Survey will be included for those questions that are the same or have the same focus and intent as the key informant interview questions. In that case, the total number of respondents will reflect a combined non-duplicative count of the respondents from both survey efforts.

Figure 16: Number of Key Informants by Level of Involvement



Participation levels indicated above reflect the respondents' degree of involvement in key program activities, including the number of meetings attended and the level of involvement in other program activities such as the Needs Assessment Team, Technical Consultation, collaborative programs, mini-grant participation, etc.

These measures will be considered when determining if a correlation exists between an informant's level of involvement and how the program activities helped to:

- Increase their awareness of health issues and environmental health tracking.
- Increase their group's capacity to understand and use data.
- Enhance their relationship with the EPHT program.
- Facilitate their willingness to continue to be involved in the Tracking effort.

Determining Findings

As noted above, a variety of data sources are helping to inform the development of the findings that will be included in the final evaluation report. Our goal is to sharpen our perspective and understanding of the factors that facilitate multi-stakeholder involvement in planning efforts and the relevancy and impact of the various program activities and products on building stakeholder capacity, as well as the contribution to the development of an EPHTN in California.

Preliminary analysis of the key informant interviews is yielding important information on the challenges and strategies inherent in soliciting and incorporating multi-stakeholder input into environmental health planning contexts. Research in this arena refers to the following three linked areas as having considerable potential to leverage the development of environmental health infrastructure.

- Improving the use of participation and local knowledge in the research process
- Developing social capital -- trust, co-operation and networks -- as a necessary underlying social environment to support the improved use of information.
- Capacity building -- supporting these approaches through the use of participatory monitoring and evaluation.

The final report will present the findings articulating the lessons learned as they may reflect current research on multi-stakeholder involvement in environmental management along with the perspectives and strategies offered by respondents to facilitate program efforts in the future.

5.j.2. Challenges and Barriers

- The change in the due date for this final report made it difficult to move forward on the evaluation effort as originally planned. Prior commitments to reviewing the CDC report recommendations were a barrier expressed by several key informants who did not have the additional time and resources to participate in the evaluation effort. The various formative evaluation efforts that so recently preceded the key informant interviews lead some key informants not to participate in "yet another evaluation activity".

5.j.3. Lessons Learned

- Ongoing and comprehensive documentation of program activities and stakeholder input has been beneficial. Having access to program records and meeting minutes has greatly lessened the challenges inherent in evaluating a planning program of this scope and duration.
- Stakeholders' experience with how their input influenced program products and processes greatly facilitated their willingness to participate in the evaluation process. Potential key informants contacted by the consultants who were not able to participate in the evaluation expressed appreciation for the program and were disappointment at not being able to participate due to conflicts in schedules.
- The ability to analyze the various stakeholder forums will help to inform our understanding of the characteristics and factors that may contribute to the success of multi-stakeholder

processes. Preliminary analysis is already yielding a greater understanding of the factors that contributed to the success of the Alameda County Advisory Group over other stakeholder processes in engaging stakeholders and maintaining program focus over time.

- In a program as EPHT, it will be important in the future to more directly integrate the evaluation process into the activities of the various stakeholder groups earlier on in the effort. Soliciting stakeholder input into the evaluation effort early on and throughout the program duration may have helped facilitate stakeholder involvement in the development of the evaluation design, focus, questions and methodology. It may have also garnered the willingness of a greater number of key informants to make participation in the evaluation effort a priority.
- One of the biggest challenges with program evaluation is finding time to involve busy staff and other program supporters in the development and implementation of the evaluation plan. Evaluation, while very important and ideally useful for program planning and modification, is very time consuming and is often far down the list of staff and collaborators' priorities. Additionally, trying to develop a concise set of questions to determine the challenges and successes, and the strengths and weaknesses of the program is very difficult. Since this is a stakeholder driven process, it involves obtaining consensus on the questions and the approaches for obtaining the evaluation information.

5.j.4. Recommendations

- Both the preliminary and final evaluation reports should be viewed as works in progress that provide perspectives and lessons learned, but are to be continually tested and assessed during the program extension period.