

Evaluation

Being involved with Safe Routes to School can be fun and exciting as people work to change behaviors and improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities. However, at the end of the day everyone wants to know if the programs and activities undertaken were successful. Decision-makers, grant administrators, and local advocates need concrete evidence that the program was a success.

For those reasons, evaluation activities are an important component of a Safe Routes to School Program and should be planned for from the beginning. Collecting data is important at the beginning of a project in order to identify and address areas of concern. This identification of a problem is a powerful motivator for action to create safe routes to school. Ongoing evaluation helps keep a project on track, and to document changes at different points in time.

Many people may worry that doing an evaluation is only about showing whether their program and activities were a success or even worse a failure. However, in reality, evaluation is about looking for continuous ways to improve the program and get feedback on your work. No programs or activities are perfect, so evaluation gives SRTS leaders the knowledge needed to make continuous improvements.

Getting Started

ENSURE THAT THE PROGRAM OBJECTIVES that you set at the beginning of the planning process are reflected in your evaluation. Look back at the goals for your program as a starting point for your evaluation, as they will guide you in deciding what evaluation activities to undertake. Your original goals will also help you decide what you want to measure.

Just like in developing a SRTS Plan, involve as many stakeholders as possible in the evaluation process. Different stakeholders will be interested in finding out different pieces of information related to their specific areas.

When developing an evaluation plan, the SRTS Task Force must keep in mind the resources that are available. Consider not just how much money is available for evaluation, but also how much time the Task Force can devote to evaluation activities.

- » Ask your SRTS Task Force if any of them have professional experience with evaluation and, if so, utilize their expertise.
- » If you have a college in your area consider contacting them to see if there are any college students who might be willing to assist with the evaluation.
- » If your committee has the funding, you may be able to contract with a consulting firm to assist with the evaluation. Having the evaluation done by someone outside the Task Force can make the results seem more impartial and will add a new perspective that can be valuable.

Gathering Data

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT INFORMATION was collected during the planning stages of your SRTS Program. Without this baseline information it is difficult to show success and do a thorough evaluation.

There are many sources of information that can be used in evaluating SRTS programs. The table lists some ideas and sources of information that are commonly used.

Potential Key Indicators of Success for a Safe Routes to School program

Outcome	Measure Before/After	Measurement Tools
<i>Change in behavior of children</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number of children walking to and from school » Number of children bicycling to and from school » Physical activity of children outside of travel to/from school » Skills/knowledge for walking and bicycling safely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Student Survey » Observation in front of school » Pre and post test
<i>Change in behavior of drivers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number of vehicles arriving and departing school at morning drop-off and evening pick-up times » Speed of vehicles in and around school area » Aggressive driving behavior (not yielding to pedestrians, etc) » Number of driving trips by parents and length of morning and evening commute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Observation on streets near school » Observation/speed board » Observation on streets near school » Survey/observation
<i>Community facilities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Quality of walking environment: amount of sidewalk, provision of other pedestrian features (bulb outs, refuge islands, etc) » Quality of bicycling environment (bike lanes, separated paths, etc) » Safely designed intersections (lights, crosswalks, etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Observation or Pre and Post Walking and Bicycling Audits
<i>Crashes and injuries</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number of traffic crashes involving children walking or biking to and from school » Severity of injuries to children from traffic on their way to and from school » Number of conflicts between motorists and pedestrians/bicyclists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Community Crash data and count of traffic stops
<i>Community buy-in</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Different groups/agencies involved in SRTS » Parent's attitudes towards allowing their children to bike/walk to school » Children's perception of walking and bicycling as a way to travel » Walking and bicycling integrated into curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Observation » Pre and Post Surveys » Pre and Post Surveys or Interviews
<i>Environmental quality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Level of air and noise pollution in school areas » Land devoted to parking and drop-off/pick-up areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Pre and Post Travel Surveys and analysis » Air pollution monitoring via mechanical device » Observation

A *SRTS Program* may collect data on all of these issues or just the ones pertinent to their *SRTS* objectives. In addition, some of this data is more technical and will likely require assistance to collect. You will need to work with your community partners to collect data on changes related to issues such as air quality, crash rates and vehicle speeds. Some information will be easier to collect such as the quality of the pedestrian facilities or the total number of cars dropping off children in the morning.

IN ADDITION, YOUR EVALUATION SHOULD INCLUDE information on number of media articles or stories, total attendance at community or neighborhood meetings, and quantity of partners involved with *SRTS* Task Force. Measuring media attention, outreach efforts and new partnerships gained is also an important measure of success for a *SRTS Program*.

Surveys

You will want to use the exact same surveys that were used during the planning process for your evaluation so that the information that you collect is comparable. From the beginning you should establish a schedule for doing surveying and stick to that schedule.

Observations

Observations are a good way to collect information for evaluation. When people respond to questions in a survey or in an interview they may be reluctant to respond in ways that won't be seen as acceptable or that might be viewed negatively. Observations can be used to gauge actual behavior such as speeding, number of cars yielding to pedestrians, number of cars dropping children off, etc.

Interviews

In addition, it may be valuable to take time to interview some key participants in the *SRTS Program*. Although you could survey a school principal or other key stakeholders you may find out more in-depth information by conducting an interview. If this is done it is important to prepare the questions before hand and ensure that the questions are focused on the information you are trying to gather. Remember to be prepared so you do not waste the person's time that you are interviewing.

Utilization

ONCE THE EVALUATION IS DONE it should be put to use. It should be used to help target changes in your activities. The evaluation may also help you find new directions for your program. The evaluation may also point to areas where you need to add emphasis.

The evaluation may also be a tool to get policy makers more interested in the *SRTS Program*. If your organization can show what affect your programs have already had, policy makers may be favorably impressed and more interested in working with you on the issues. Your Task Force may want to try and arrange to make a presentation of the information to your school board or community's elected officials. A well-designed presentation with visuals can be a more effective method of getting your message across than simply sending the report.

Evaluation Report

Formal Report

A longer, more detailed report should be prepared that includes all the important information that was collected from the evaluation. This longer report should be available for funding agencies, policy makers, local advocacy organizations and Task Force members.

Executive Report

A shorter report should be made available for parents, teachers, and other stakeholders who will not have the time to read a long formal report but who are interested in the evaluation findings.

Press Release

A one-page press release summarizing the evaluation findings should be sent to the local papers to get the word out in the community.

Resources

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR ALL *SRTS Programs* to gather data. We realize that it can be hard to gather some of the data that has been discussed. In addition, the information can vary from month to month, and season to season. Data gathered from children can be inaccurate or incomplete. Nevertheless, as more people in more communities work on *SRTS*, everyone's data will add to the overall understanding of what works.

A guide to doing program evaluation is available through the University of Wisconsin Extension. The guides are available online at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evaldocs.html> or hard copies can be ordered.