

Connecting Research & Practice: Strategies for Conducting Useful, Effective Program Evaluations

Beth L. Green, Ph.D.

President, NPC Research

Portland, Oregon USA

green@npcresearch.com



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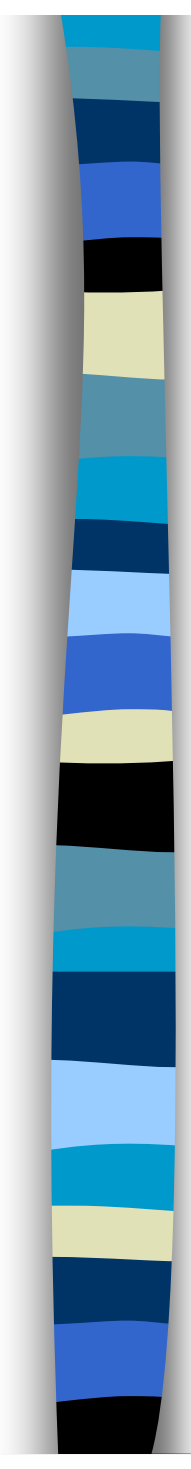
Presentation Overview

- Define “Successful Evaluation”
- Review 5 Key Elements of Successful Evaluations
- Provide Example of a “Successful” Evaluation of Child Abuse Prevention Program
- Q & A – Your evaluation questions and challenges



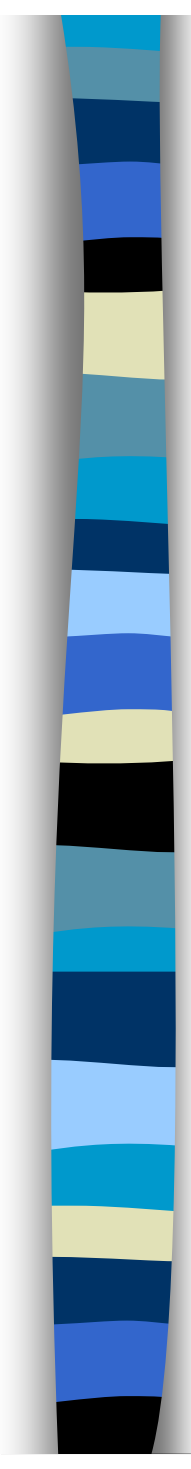
What Is Evaluation?

- **Systematic** collection and use of program-related information for:
 - program improvement,
 - accountability,
 - program management,
 - assessing effectiveness
 - informing policy



What Is “Successful” Evaluation?

- **Successful Evaluation:** Produces scientifically defensible information that :
 1. Answers meaningful questions about program and important functioning and
 2. Is used by stakeholders
- Useful evaluation = intended use by intended users (Patton, 2007)
- Often, evaluations have multiple intended uses and intended users



What Is “Successful” Evaluation?

- Successful evaluation requires carefully thinking through:
 - The **questions** that need to be answered
 - The **type of program** being evaluated
 - How information will be **generated**
 - How results will be **used**, and by **whom**



Challenges to Conducting Useful Evaluations

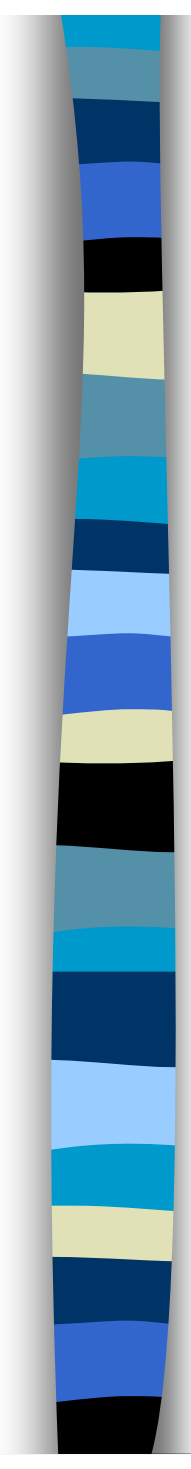
- Multiple stakeholders
- Multiple questions
- Multiple information needs
- Balancing the multiples:
 - Coming to consensus about evaluation questions
 - Prioritizing which questions can be answered, when, and with what degree of certainty
 - Keeping the scope of the evaluation within resource constraints (time, staffing, & money)



Planning Ahead for Successful Evaluation: 5 Key Steps to Success

1. Identify Key Stakeholders
2. Develop a Logic Model
3. Develop a Data Collection Plan
4. Collect & Manage Information
5. Analyze & Report Information

“Planning is essential. Plans are useless”
~ General D.D. Eisenhower



Step 1: Identify & Involve Key Stakeholders – ***Participatory Evaluation Approaches***

Key reference: Cousins & Earl, 1992, The case for participatory evaluation, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 14, 397-418.



Involving Stakeholders From Multiple Systems

- Shared ownership (staff, participants, management, funders)
- Address stakeholder questions as feasible
- Include the right stakeholders, especially those in positions to make changes based on results
- Be clear about decision making: who's in charge, who makes final decisions, and who's responsible for implementing and overseeing the evaluation.



Step 2: Develop a Logic Model *Program Theory Approach*

Key reference: Chen & Rossi, (1983). Evaluating with sense: The theory-driven approach, *Evaluation Review*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 283-302.



Elements of a Logic Model

The logic model lays out what the program is expected to achieve, based on an expected chain of events that link:

- A. Target Population** – who are you doing it for?
- B. Inputs** – what resources are needed to provide the program?
- C. Program Activities** – what are you doing & how often?
- D. Theory of Change** – why or how do you think activities lead to outcomes?
- E. Outputs** – how will you know activities are implemented as planned?
- F. Short & Long-Term Outcomes** – what changes do you expect in participants?



Benefits of a Logic Model

1. Develops **shared understanding** of the program across the systems
2. Helps to **bare assumptions** about *how* the program is expected work and *what* outcomes are expected
3. Helps to **restrain over-promising** about what evaluation can do
4. Provides a **framework for evaluation** questions and data-gathering
5. **Promotes communication** between system stakeholders



Key Elements of a Logic Model

- **A. Target population:** Identify your target population, including eligibility or exclusionary criteria – who will receive services?
- **B. Program inputs:** Includes staff, volunteer resources, training, number of hours worked, material goods, etc.—what is needed to provide the service?
- **C. Program Activities/Strategies:** The key services that are being provided, including desired frequency



Key Elements, Continued: Expected Outputs & Outcomes

D. Outputs: Number of service units provided, or other measure of the actual implementation of each strategy

E. Long- and Short-Term Outcomes

- ***Short-Term Outcomes:*** the immediate program effects that you expect to achieve during or soon after the program is completed
- ***Long-Term Outcomes:*** the long-term or ultimate effects from the program (6 months, 1 year)



Considerations in Establishing Outcomes

- There is no *right* number of outcomes.
- **Be realistic!** Programs have **more** influence over immediate outcomes and **less** influence over longer-term outcomes.
- Long-term outcomes, however, should be within the scope of the program's purpose and target audience.



The Missing Link: “Theory of Change” for Each Activity

- Include a statement explaining the logic of **why** each activity should lead to outcomes
- **Use an if-then format:**
 - **If** we do this activity, **then** *what changes happen* that will lead to the short term outcomes?
 - **If** we provide child development information to parents, **then** parents will have a better understanding of their child’s behavior.
 - **If** parents have a better understanding of their child’s behavior, **then** they will be less likely to be harsh/severe in their parenting.



An Example Logic Model



Step 2B: Use the Logic Model to Build the Evaluation

Develop & Prioritize Evaluation Questions

With your stakeholders, **identify key evaluation questions** based on the logic model – what do you need to know about the program’s services and outcomes?

Ultimately, you may want to generate a “long list” of possible evaluation questions that can be considered. **But this list must be prioritized**



Prioritizing Evaluation Questions

To prioritize, review logic model and consider:

- What questions **MUST** you answer (to meet reporting or other requirements)?
- What questions would you **LIKE** to answer and **WHY** (how will you use the information)?
- What changes or outcomes are realistic?
- What are your resources for gathering and compiling information?



Remember!

- ✓ No evaluation can answer every question. Be thoughtful and narrow your questions to those that are most important to answer.
- ✓ **Most frequent mistake in evaluations:** Trying to gather too much information – useful evaluations are streamlined, not burdensome, and collect only what is most important.



Step 3: Developing a Data Collection Plan



Step 3A: Identify Data to Gather

- Start with evaluation question(s)
- What information is needed to answer the questions?
- What information is already collected somewhere & how can you get it?
- What new information will need to be collected?
- **PRIME DIRECTIVE: AVOID DUPLICATION OF PAPER WORK & DATA COLLECTION!!!**

Strategies for Data Collection

Administrative Data

- **Pros:** “Objective”, may reduce costs,
- **Cons:** Often lots of missing information, inconsistent information, electronic data requires complex manipulation, be prepared to do extensive data cleaning
- **Most success:** Data required for billing, legal information

Staff Collects

- **Pros:** Reduces costs, increases buy-in to evaluation
- **Cons:** Requires lots of training and support for clean/consistent data; Can be perceived as less objective, esp. for outcomes; information more “self-presentational”
- **Most success:** Large scale evaluation with clearly defined variables

Researcher Collects

- **Pros:** More control over data quality/consistency; more direct interaction with participants
- **Cons:** Expensive, can be difficult to build rapport elicit sensitive information, logistics, esp for large-scale programs
- **Success:** Well-funded, more rigorous evaluations; local evaluations



Step 4: Collecting & Managing Information



Managing Data Collection When Researchers Don't Collect the Data

- Provide good training to staff
- Have a program supervisor reviewing data in-house
- Have an evaluation staff liaison for TA
- Provide programs with tools for monitoring process (who, when of data collection)
- Provide timely data feedback to programs
 - Make sure a key individual will receive the reports and review them
 - Make sure programs understand principle of **“garbage in, garbage out”**
- **Monitor, monitor, monitor**
- **Clean, clean, clean**



Step 5: Analyzing & Reporting Information



Creating a Useful Report

- Involve your stakeholders & know your audience
- Be sure data analysis is answering your research questions.
- Be sure stakeholders from all systems review interim findings to provide interpretations.
- Keep it simple, Keep it short:
 - Simple analysis and presentation
 - Know the power of the bulleted list & text box
 - [Pictures](#) are worth 1000 words

Making it Useful: Examples from an Evaluation of a Child Abuse Prevention Program



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Healthy Start Program

- Statewide home visiting program
- Serves high-risk first time parents
- Primary goal: reduce child maltreatment



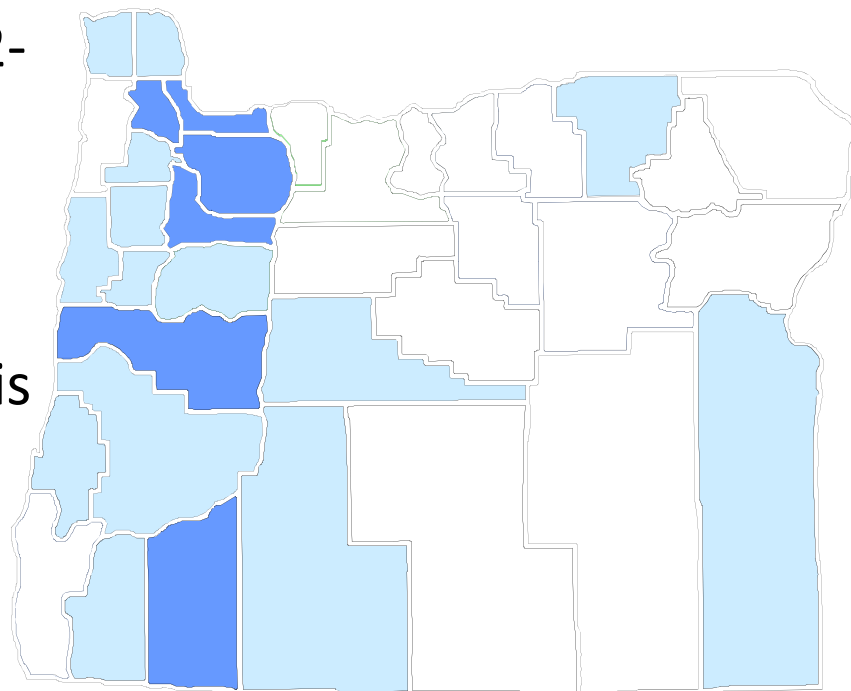


Healthy Start Program Evaluation

- Required in Statute
- Began with original program in 1994 in six counties
- Current cost: about 2% of state program budget
- Performance measurement approach
 - Longitudinal outcome measurement
 - Data collected by program staff, processed & analyzed by evaluation team
 - No control groups
 - Compare to national and local benchmarks

Program Context 2004-05

- Rapid expansion during 2002-2003 roll-out
- Wide variability in program implementation
- 2004: Statewide budget crisis & 20% overall budget cut to Healthy Start
- Legislative concerns with program quality and distribution of funds

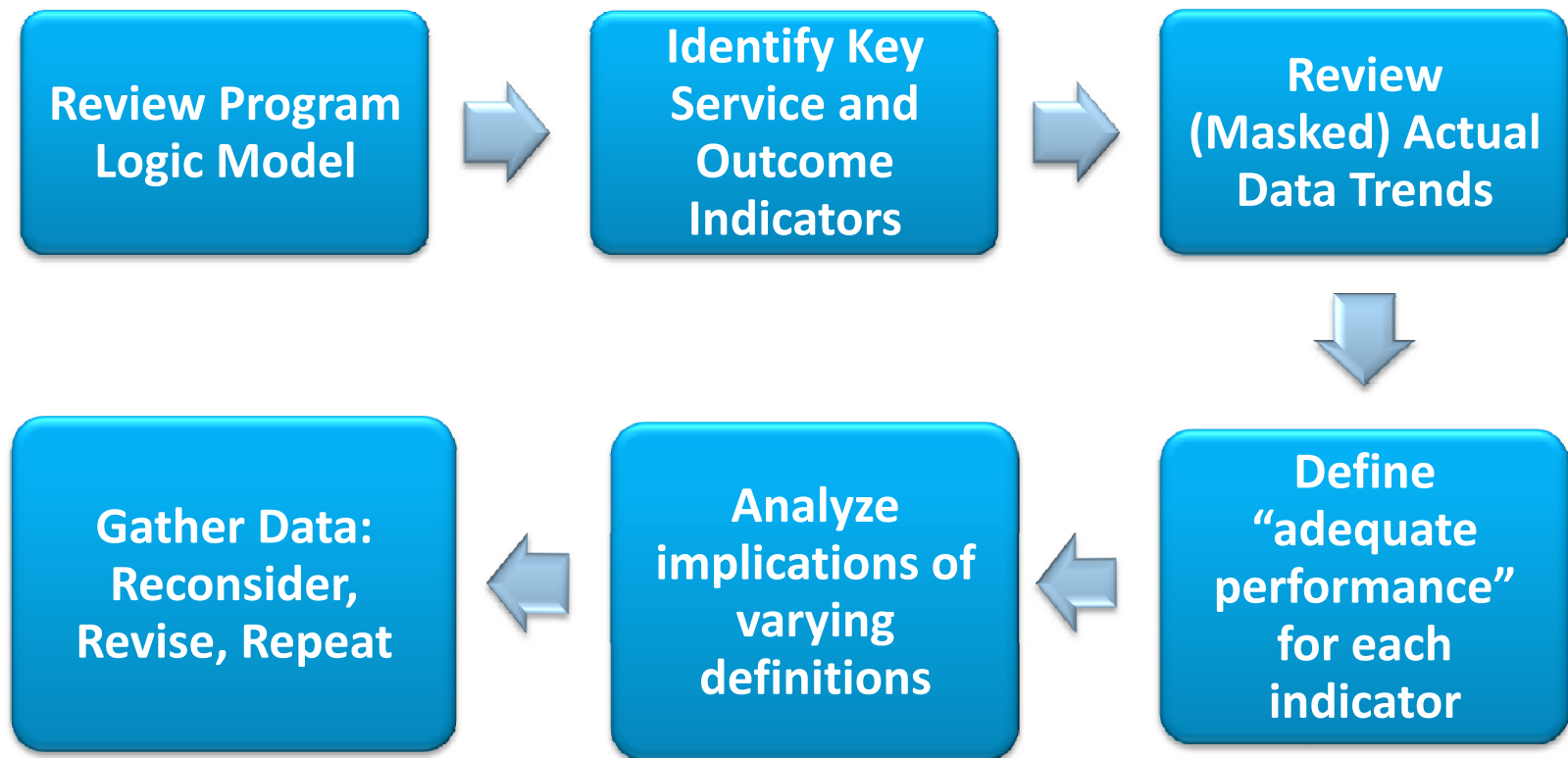




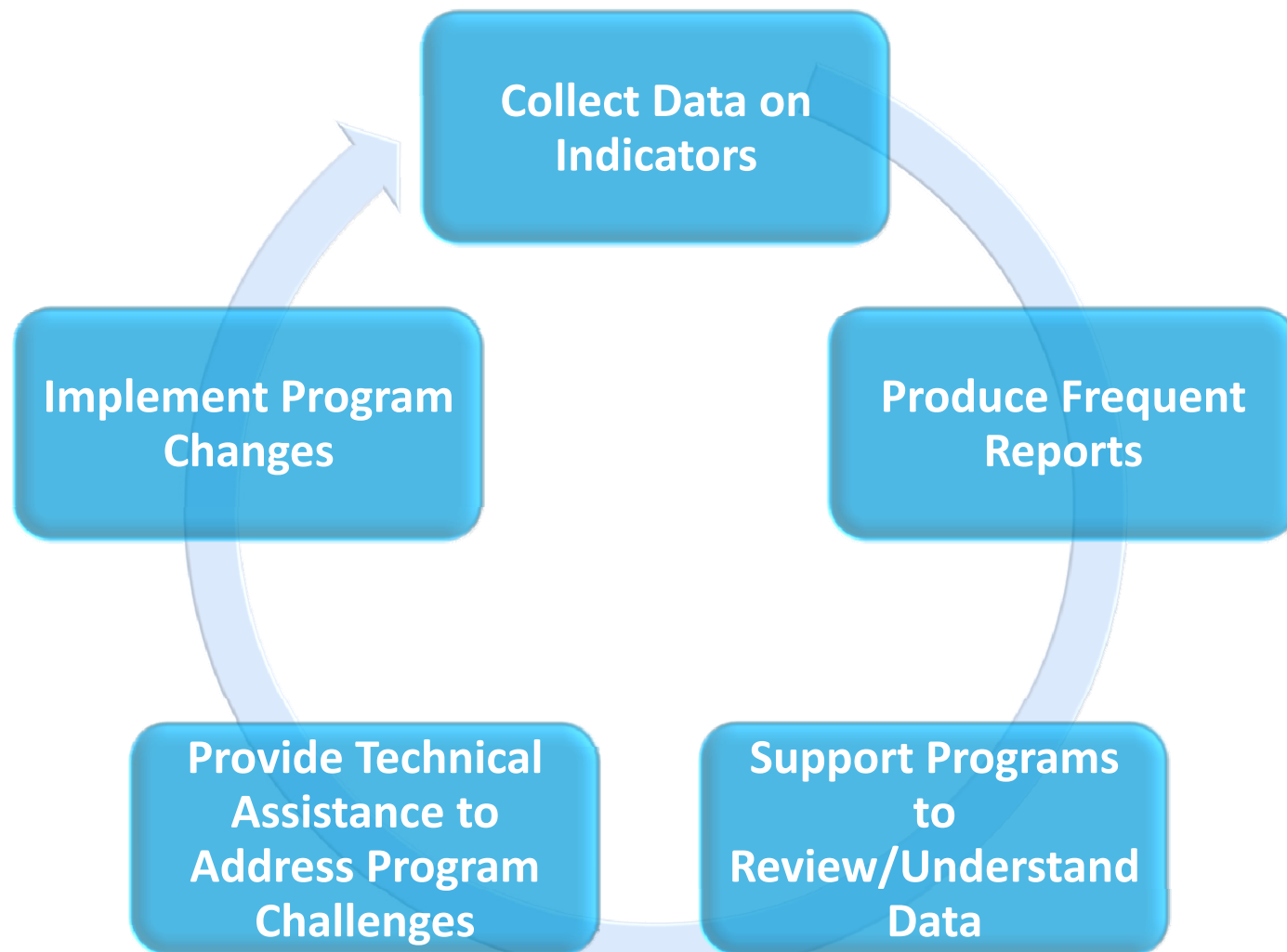
Program Response

1. Pursue Evidence-Based Model Accreditation (Healthy Families America, HFA)
2. Implement HFA's 100+ Performance Standards
3. Develop Specific Performance Measures Based on Evaluation data
4. Use Performance Measures to Monitor Performance & Ensure Quality

Defining & Using Program Performance Indicators



Implement Information Feedback Process



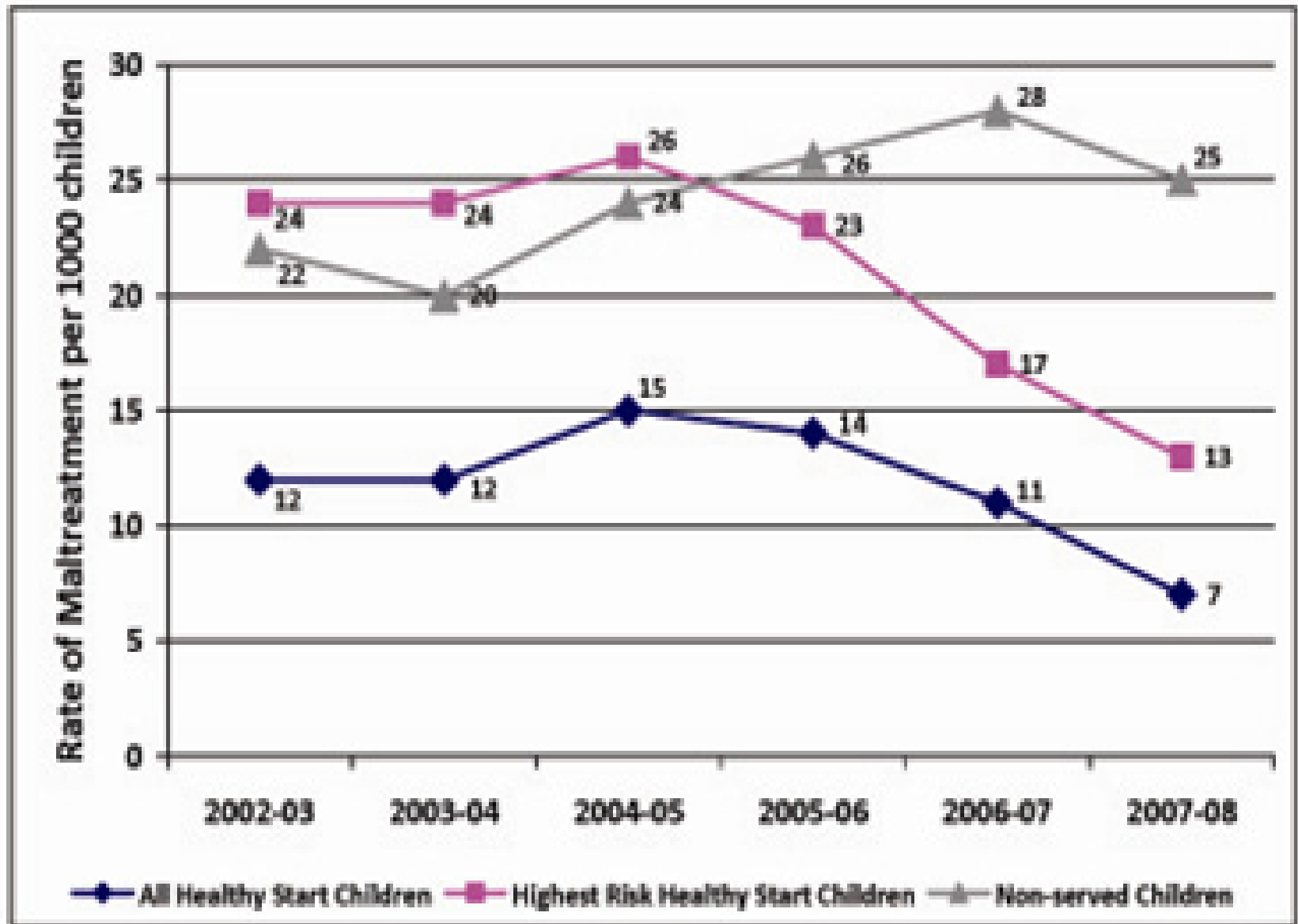
Where Are We Now?

Focus on Quality = Improved
Outcomes for Children!



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Figure 1. Rate of Maltreatment for Healthy Start vs. Non-Healthy Start Children





Current Evaluation System

- Links the PI's to state QA system
 - Annual site visits
- Uses multiple strategies to promote “hands on” work with data by program managers/staff
 - Annual “analysis” worksheets
 - Annual (and more frequent) review of select HFA standards using eval data
 - “Do it yourself” program report
- Individual Program Support Plans



Keys to Successful Evaluation

- Involve stakeholders in developing, implementing and using evaluation
- Use a logic model & let it be a living guide to the program & evaluation
- Be ruthless in prioritizing questions and streamlining data collection
- Abandon lengthy and detailed reports – focus on what information is most useful to audience
- Be self-critical and learn from what's worked (or hasn't worked) in the past