

Setting criteria to guide your evaluation using quality rubrics

Prepared for a monthly seminar for the NT Regional AES Group presented by Nea Harrison on 14 May 2014.

Developing criteria for judging how good the outcomes and processes for a program or project are will help us clearly determine what is value and best practice and what is not.

The following process is used by Pandanus Evaluation & Planning Services. It adapts the processes outlined by Jane Davidson for determining merit. See Davidson, E J. (2005). *Evaluation Methodology Basics: the nuts and bolts of sound evaluation*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, California.

What is a rubric?

A rubric is a tool that provides an evaluative description of what good, excellent (etc) quality; value or performance would look like in practice. It allows for interpretation of qualitative, quantitative and mixed method data.

Developing a quality rubric is best done as a collaborative activity with key stakeholders. It involves key stakeholders who know a lot about the context and required outcomes of a project setting standards – or definitions of what should constitute ‘excellent’, ‘satisfactory’, or ‘unsatisfactory’ performance.

By applying those standards to the data we collect we will be able to draw clearly evaluative conclusions about performance on a particular part or component of a program or project.

How many levels?

Around four or five is best. Too few and it is hard to show improvements, too many and it becomes too difficult. They can be labelled to suit the project.

For example:

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Adequate / Just acceptable
- Inadequate / ineffective
- Poor / detrimental / unacceptable

Process for developing a rubric

1. Identify which are your most important evaluation questions or areas to look at
2. Decide how many levels you want and the appropriate labels for them
3. Brainstorm what distinguishes 'Excellent' (Best practice or highly effective) from 'Poor' (or ineffective / unacceptable performance)
4. determine the bottom level (poor, unacceptable) first:
"Any one or more of the following (is unacceptable)"
5. Determine the 'Just Acceptable' level next (if doing more than 3 levels)
6. Determine the 'Excellent' next
7. Then determine the "Good" or "Very Good" etc.

Some examples of rubrics provided by Jane Davidson



Rubrics may be very criterion-specific, e.g. Parent & whānau engagement in education

Rating	Description
Highly effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Parents/whānau are extremely well-informed, confident and highly engaged in their children's education in ways that maximise the children's potential.<input type="checkbox"/> Parent and whānau knowledge and perspectives are well respected, highly valued and fully integrated in ways that benefit the children's education.<input type="checkbox"/> Māori content and language are clearly evident and infused in ways that are appropriate for local whānau.
Minimally effective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Levels of parent/whānau/caregiver engagement are <u>just sufficient</u> to support children's education, although there is significant room for improvement<input type="checkbox"/> The school demonstrates understanding of Māori, Pasifika and other cultures, including the concepts of whānau, co-parenting and other family structures.
Poor or Detrimental	<p><u>Any one or more of the following:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Levels of whānau engagement are <u>extremely low</u> or are <u>deteriorating</u> – to an extent that adversely impacts children's education<input type="checkbox"/> Whānau report being talked "at" or down to, made to feel unwelcome or stupid, or that their perspectives are disrespected or sidelined<input type="checkbox"/> Information is either withheld or presented in ways that prevent meaningful whānau involvement

Source: MOE projects (various)

Rubrics can also be generic, to be applied across a range of questions/criteria

Performance Rating	Performance Descriptors for Answering Key Evaluation Questions
Excellent	Performance is clearly very strong or exemplary in relation to the question. Any gaps or weaknesses are not significant and are managed effectively.
Good	Performance is generally strong in relation to the question. No significant gaps or weaknesses, and less significant gaps or weaknesses are mostly managed effectively.
Adequate	Performance is inconsistent in relation to the question. Some gaps or weaknesses. Meets minimum expectations/ requirements as far as can be determined.
Poor	Performance is unacceptably weak in relation to the question. Does not meet minimum expectations/requirements.
Insufficient evidence	Evidence unavailable or of insufficient quality to determine performance.

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Source: NZQA's External Evaluation & Review framework

Example of a quality rubric developed for the Palmerston Tiwi Islands Communities for Children Program

The following example was developed for the Palmerston Tiwi Islands Communities for Children Program. The quality rubric was developed to clarify quality in relation to the key Program outcomes identified in the program logic. It is organised under the key evaluation questions set for the Program. The quality rubric has guided evaluation activities over the 5-year life of the Program to date.

Participatory development of the quality rubric was beneficial for helping key stakeholders clearly articulate expected (but usually fuzzy) outcomes such as quality community engagement, community acceptance and ownership, cultural appropriateness, partnership, governance and participation actually involved.

Rating	EXCELLENT (Best practice)	GOOD (Expected)	JUST ADEQUATE (Needs improving)	UNACCEPTABLE
Effectiveness				
To what extent did the C4C Activities meet their aims and objectives? How effective were Community Partners in: Encouraging children and families from target groups to participate? Referring participants to appropriate follow up services? Linking and coordinating with other Services? Building capacity of local people? Employing local people? How effective were the partnerships created?				
• Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity is accessed by a wide range of people from different groups in the community especially hard to engage groups High level of attendance by all participants Activity involves and welcomes all members of the family (particularly husbands and children) Parents and children actively participating in the Activity High level of enjoyment expressed by participants Participants take ownership of the Activity through helping organise or conduct activities Service agreement KPIs are exceeded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity is accessed by people from different groups in the community especially hard to engage groups Good attendance levels with more than 80% of participants attending regularly (80% of time) Parents and children actively participating in the Activity High level of satisfaction expressed by participants (more than 80%) Participants find the Activity useful Service agreement KPIs are met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity is accessed by people from some groups in the community including hard to engage groups Average attendance levels with 80% of participants attending regularly (80% of time) (50%) of Parents and children actively participating in the Activity Moderate level of satisfaction expressed by participants (more than 70%) Service agreement KPIs are met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity is accessed by people from only one or two groups in the community No access by hard to engage groups Poor attendance Very few participants attend regularly Participants who are attending are not actively engaged in the Activity Low levels of satisfaction expressed by more than 30 % of participants Service agreement KPIs are not met
Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships between Community Partners / and or other services have been established and partnership processes documented in formal agreements Community Partners are working in partnership with community in line with documented processes and or agreements Partnerships contribute to significantly improved service delivery Partnership contribute to significantly better access to services for participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships between Community Partners / and or other services have been established and partnership processes documented Community Partners are working in partnership with community in line with documented processes Partnerships contribute to clearly improved service delivery Partnerships support families to navigate the service sector effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CPs communicate and liaise with other services Some partnerships are evident between CPs and limited number of other organisations Partnerships contribute to better access for participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No or low levels of partnership between services