

Evaluating No Community Left Behind (NCLB) Strategy

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Evaluating a NCLB Strategy

Introduction

This document presents an abbreviated but step-by-step approach to evaluating NCLB strategy development process in various program areas. It has been written primarily for NCLB coordinators who are planning for a local evaluation, working with a local evaluator, or launching a self-evaluation effort.

The City of Ottawa has established Knowledge Transfer Table which will be providing systematic support for the evaluation of the NCLB strategy in various neighbourhoods. However, this document predates developments on the Community Development Framework (CDF) and we hope this will be of interest to those who may not have such a system level support for evaluation available.

Why Evaluate Your NCLB Strategy?

Everyone with a stake in a local NCLB strategy and community action planning has an interest in knowing whether the program is operating as intended and whether it is effective and worthwhile for designated neighbourhoods and individuals. Accurate information is vital for understanding the success or failure of the NCLB strategy development process, and for expanding or replicating activities that work and fixing those that don't. Community staff responsible for coordinating NCLB 's many technical aspects must provide information to supporting agencies to enable them to judge whether their resources are being well spent.

These interests can be met through comprehensive local NCLB evaluations. A comprehensive evaluation includes a process evaluation that describes how the program operates and whether it is operating as you and other stakeholders intended, as well as an impact evaluation that describes how well your program operates and whether it is effective in reaching stated goals. Any number of relevant tools can be used to go through the required steps for evaluation.

Evaluation in five easy steps

1. Plan -- Decide what you want to know and how to get the answers. Advance planning for information gathering is critical to the success of local (and all!) evaluation efforts.
2. Identify an evaluator -- Recruit an experienced evaluator from a local university, private firm, or agency, or launch a self-evaluation within the organization.
3. Describe and assess how your NCLB strategy works vis-à-vis how you (collectively with other partner organizations) intended it to work.
4. Assess how well the NCLB strategy works in reaching long-term objectives such as increasing resident participation, increasing the community's perceptions of safety, increasing the effectiveness of service delivery and improving neighbourhoods physically and economically.

5. Communicate your evaluation results and strive to strengthen any weak points in your strategy. Keep your record-keeping systems current. And always, always, celebrate your successes.

Challenges of evaluating an NCLB strategy

A local evaluation of NCLB is in part a compilation of many focused evaluations of strategies launched by local community health and resource centers, community organizations, city departments, youth service agencies, the Ottawa Police Service, and citizens themselves. Advance planning is crucial to the multi-faceted evaluation needed, in to build data requirements into routine record keeping efforts.

Running an NCLB initiative requires sharing sensitive information among key partners. Practical and legal barriers to sharing information should be fully aired during early meetings of the Steering Committee, and participating agencies should achieve a common understanding regarding information sharing, storage, access, and dissemination.

Comparison areas are needed in a local evaluation to help assess whether any differences observed in the designated area were due to the NCLB efforts or some other factor(s), yet they nearly double the evaluation effort. They do little to answer the oft-repeated question of displacement if the effort is related to crime prevention: "Did you reduce violent crime or just move it across town?" City-wide, non-designated area data can help. Community surveys are increasingly difficult to launch technically, and the best ways are the most expensive. New record keeping systems may be needed to accurately track NCLB data.

All of these methodological issues often add up to costs, gaps, and delays in data collection and analysis. Again, these may be reduced by coordinated advance planning and will be helped by the addition of dedicated evaluation staff.

Planning an Evaluation of NCLB

The potential NCLB sites need to begin planning for a local evaluation, methodically or not, during the process of neighbourhood identification. A brief community needs assessment and a plan identifying goals, objectives, tasks, and outcome measures leads to a good beginning.

Ideally, evaluation needs to be a topic of discussion from the first meeting of the local Steering Committee. It is much easier to design an evaluation while developing program activities than to try to tack one on after the fact.

In particular, it is much easier to build in data collection steps from the start rather than recreating data long after the intervention is underway. Yet regardless of when an evaluation is designed, the basic planning steps are the same. Program goals and objectives (which point naturally to evaluation objectives) need to be identified, and it must be decided exactly which questions need to be answered and with what rigor. Finally, the evaluation methodology must be designed and it must be determined how to get the information desired.

Identifying goals and objectives

The first step in most evaluations is to specify goals and objectives, fine-tuned into measurable terms.

Goals are broad statements of the NCLB program's principal aims, such as “to create healthy and safe environments and provide accessible, integrated and holistic services to communities in need.”

Objectives are narrower, measurable, operational specifications of goals. Local strategies will determine what objectives match the goal of creating healthy and safe environments, and the list of objectives may be as extensive as the partners’ ideas and dreams.

Who should be involved in specifying the local NCLB goals and objectives?

The general answer is that it should be the stakeholders, who are individuals representing organizations, agencies, or groups working in the designated neighbourhood or affected by the changes in that specific neighbourhood.

The more specific answer is clear in the mandated local organizational structure: the stakeholders are found in the NCLB Steering Committee and significant subcommittees. These committee members have a vested interest in seeing the NCLB strategy succeed, and, among other responsibilities, are charged with the responsibility to develop a vision or mission statement, conduct a community needs assessment, set goals, and commit resources to the selected activities.

The NCLB objectives are always multiple, and various stakeholders will have varying, even competing, views of appropriate objectives. These differences need not be detrimental to an evaluation effort. Rather, the respective stakeholders should discuss and reach a consensus on the short- and long-term goals of the NCLB process, then identify multiple specific objectives for achieving them. This process may occur over the course of several meetings during the implementation phase.

Developing a conceptual framework or logic model

Developing a conceptual framework, or a logic model, is another way to specify how the various components of the strategy lead to desired outcomes; this goes hand-in-hand with the specification of goals and objectives.

Some objectives which may be listed under the goal of reducing youth crime:

Expand the number and type of community service opportunities for non-violent youth offenders.

Identify the top 100 high risk youth in our neighbourhood whose prior offences have involved alcohol, drug, and/or weapons.

Add 20 outpatient drug abuse slots for youths.

Increase by 20% the number of youth who enter drug abuse, anger management, or other appropriate programs within two years.

Reduce the number of alcohol, drug, and/or weapons violations committed by youth by 30% within 3 years.

Increase job and recreational opportunities for high risk youth.

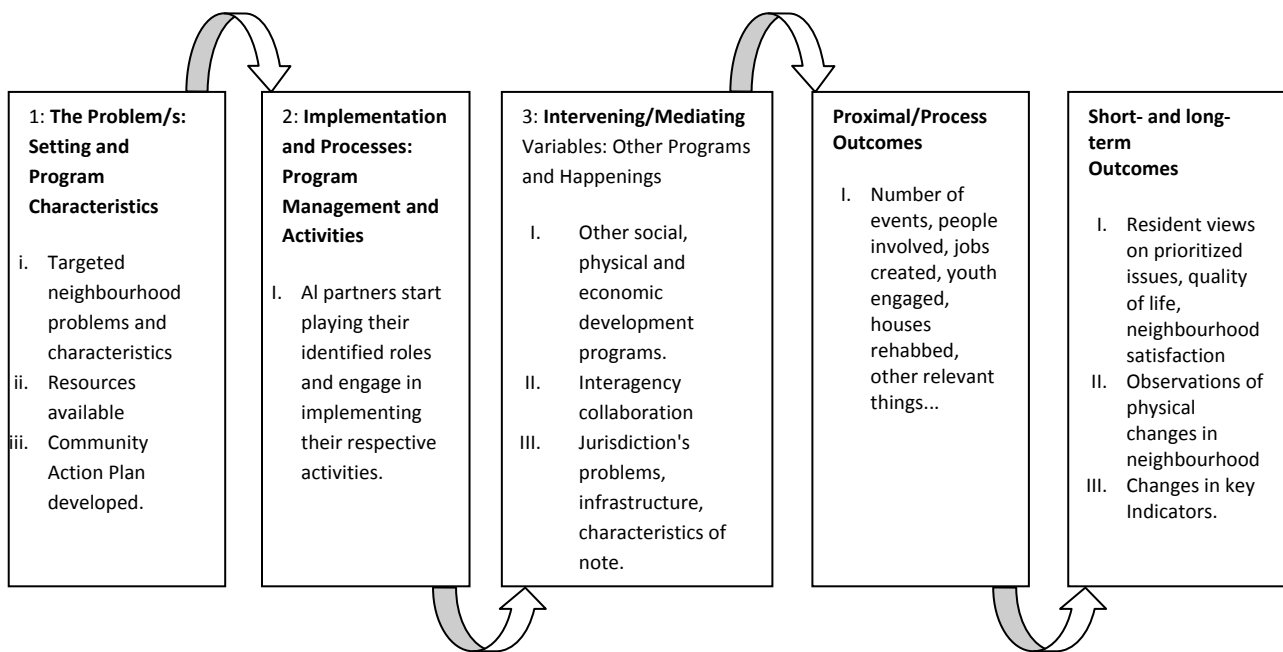
A logic model is a graphic version of the key elements of a given program that identifies how the desired outcomes result from the interventions applied to a given problem in an identified setting. A simplified version of a logic model can be used to outline the types of information needed for the evaluation. Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework -- a kind of a bird's eye view -- of a comprehensive local NCLB evaluation.

The NCLB conceptual framework begins with the identification and selection of a target problem that occurs in a specific setting; a neighbourhood with known characteristics and resources. [Column 1] A community action plan is developed through the NCLB strategy to address the target problem. It begins with the creation of a multi-agency partnership which closely examines the target problem in consultation with the residents, designated neighbourhood, and resources available, and launches appropriate intervention strategies with active community engagement [Column 2] to achieve certain immediate proximal outcomes [Column 4].

The outcomes of these intervention strategies may also be affected by historical and current events outside of the program [Column 3]. These "contextual conditions" are often pictured in a long horizontal box that stretches below the entire conceptual framework to indicate that local conditions and events may affect all aspects of the strategy. As the intervention strategies continue, it is hoped that positive changes in longer-term outcomes will occur [Column 5].

A full understanding of how and how well a NCLB strategy works requires expanding this bird's eye view into a more detailed evaluation road map.

Figure 1: Simplified Conceptual Framework for Evaluation



Choosing and working with a local evaluator

In this report both the spirit of self-evaluation and the rigor of neutral, objective examination are embraced.

Much of what is called process evaluation is simply good program monitoring. While there are definite advantages to an evaluation conducted by outside experts, having program practitioners engage in self-evaluation has its benefits as well.

The approach taken here is pragmatic, aiming to provide local program practitioners with the basic knowledge and tools to meet evaluation needs.

Find a local evaluator with a broad range of relevant experience and expertise, and time to devote substantial attention to the many facets of an NCLB evaluation. With the input of the Steering Committee, specify the role of the evaluator.

Often the exercise becomes a self-evaluation because most of the agencies which could help in independent evaluation are tied to the NCLB in different capacities. Moreover, the way the NCLB action plans are designed, the work and progress speaks for itself. It is not difficult to monitor the progress and compile all the results to produce an evaluation report that validates the same results through various sources and data.

Evaluation design

Evaluation, or research, design refers to how impact evaluations are conducted. The strategic aim is to control factors so that any observed differences in key outcomes (such as increased community mobilization) may be accurately attributed to the NCLB intervention and not some other event or activity.

A solid design for evaluating an NCLB strategy is a quasi-experimental design in the form of a pre/post case study with a comparison area. Anything less rigorous will leave the work open to criticisms. More rigorous evaluation designs will be prohibitively expensive. In practical terms, a pre/post case study helps a lot and one need not pay for an expensive evaluation in order to have credible evaluation results. A pre/post case study with a comparison area means:

Where can you find a good evaluator?

1. Your local college or university. Partner with professors in psychology, sociology, criminal justice, public administration, or another relevant research field. Call the chairs of these departments or the central administration to inquire about affiliated policy or research institutes.
2. Independent research firms and consultants, depending on the availability of funding.
4. Find out about who is working with similar programs.

Qualities to search for in your evaluator:

- A solid understanding of social science and criminal justice research techniques coupled with relevant experience.
- A broad knowledge of NCLB key components and how to measure change in these areas.
- Patience, comfort working with multiple agencies and committees, good humor, cultural competence, discipline, organization.

1. Developing a detailed description and assessment (a.k.a. the Neighbourhood Profile) of how the NCLB site operates. The Neighbourhood Profile will be both qualitative and quantitative. It will include a written description of the designated neighbourhood, general characteristics and trends, demographic breakdown, and other related information, as well as how the NCLB Steering Committee was formed, how the partners work together, the nature of the intervention activities, etc., coupled with information as to how many youth attend Boys and Girls Club activities, etc.
2. Gathering "baseline" (before the program begins in earnest) information on key impact indicators, such as the number of community members meeting regularly to discuss community problems, number of arrests (if any) in the designated area, number of youth participating in afterschool programs, resident satisfaction with the neighbourhood, number of calls for service, etc., and then repeating the same data collection effort when program impact is expected to be measurable, usually one to two years after implementation (this is the pre/post part).

A simple example: if reducing break and enter incidents in the designated neighbourhood is a goal, the evaluation study might include figures on the number of arrests for crimes involving the use of a weapon for a period immediately preceding the NCLB interventions, during the interventions, and afterwards. If these figures are gathered monthly, a simple timeline graph will show whether this measure is going up or down over time. (For the statistically sophisticated, 50 months or more of these data may be used for time series analysis.)

Alternatively, examples and stats from pre-intervention to post-interventions periods can also be compared.

Conducting the Process Evaluation

Step 1: Collect information

What? A local NCLB evaluation should begin with a basic description and subjective assessment of the site's history, implementation, central characteristics (including its goals, organization and management, designated neighbourhood characteristics, and resources), competing and complementary efforts, and current operations on the community action plan. This will encompass the information contained in Columns 1-4 of the conceptual framework. This information is fleshed out in the "blueprints" for documenting program characteristics (Table 1) and monitoring progress (Table 2) below.

Yet as detailed as these blueprints may appear, they are only suggestive of the types of information you will want to collect -- while local NCLB sites have much in common, each also has a unique strategy and local evaluations must be tailored to meet individual site needs.

How? There are two primary methods for gathering the data needed to assess program operations: (1) interviewing and/or surveying the full range of stakeholders and partners and (2) gathering and reviewing program documents.

1. Gathering and reviewing program documents -- Historical and current program materials are a rich source of information for studying program operations. These should be pulled together and culled for information for the case study.
2. Interviewing and/or surveying stakeholders and partners -- Key stakeholders in the NCLB strategy and primary partners and staff (especially those who have been involved since the beginning) hold special knowledge of the program's early history, development and implementation, and current day-to-day activities. Informal interviews should be conducted with a few key individuals to produce an objective summary of the program's history and key events, combined with information gleaned from program documents. If this summary is compiled by essentially one person, as may be the case in a self-evaluation, others should review it for completeness and accuracy.

More structured interviews should be conducted with all stakeholders or a good cross-section of them to gather systematic information about the functioning and dynamics of the NCLB partnership. This step may be best conducted in person by an independent evaluator, as interviews enable one to gather detailed information and ask clarification questions as needed. A written survey mailed to stakeholders enables the information to be gathered anonymously, although the group of respondents is typically rather small and their identities may be evident from their responses. The information to be gathered is subjective and the nature of the questions is that they require mostly open-ended answers – another obstacle to written surveys.

Table 1

Blue print for the Community Action Plan Documentation

Program Characteristics	Suggested Details to Capture
Goals and Objectives	<p>Goals: Broad statements of the community action plan’s principal aims or purposes. Examples: (1) To improve the quality of neighbourhood life. (2) To engage youth in positive activities.</p> <p>Objectives: Measurable, operational specifications of goals. Examples: (1) To remove abandoned shopping carts and trash from neighbourhood streets. (2) Establish youth councils and arrange drop-ins for youth.</p>
Designated neighbourhood and comparison area characteristics	<p>Population, Area size, City blocks. Racial/ethnic, gender, age, household composition. Income level. Housing: % renter-occupied, % public, vacancy rate, number abandoned. Unemployment rate. School dropout rate, achievement scores. Assets, resources, community associations, and institutions.</p>
NCLB organization and management	<p>Membership and role/responsibilities of Steering Committee and all other committees and subcommittees. Meetings: Date, attendance, minutes. Staff: Position, employing agency, supervisory agency, time devoted to NCLB. Training and technical assistance received in building partnerships.</p>
Resources available	<p>Funds available for community engagement activities. Other available funds, classified by program area and activities/purpose. From each participating agency: Total staff support, resources and in-kind support given to the designated neighbourhood. Available programs and activities for different age groups (Inventory of resources).</p>
Competing and complementary efforts/programs	<p>Descriptions of other programs underway.</p>

Table 2

Blue print for Program Monitoring.

Please note that problems, assets and prioritized issues vary from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. Under each core component (social, service, physical and economic) we are giving one or two general examples for the sake of understanding only.

Core components and Related Activities	Process Measures (Data to be collected)	General Sources of Data
<p>Program Management: Steering Committee and subcommittee activities.</p>	<p>Partnership dynamics -- communication, coordination, leadership, etc. Agency resources/contributions to NCLB</p>	<p>Survey of Steering Committee members.</p>
<p>Social Activities for social cohesion and youth engagement:</p> <p>Youth Councils. Boys and Girls Clubs. Alternative activities for youth. Community Dinners</p> <p>Crime prevention (examples): High visibility OPS patrols. Establishment of Neighbourhood Watch. Issuing trespassing tickets. Search/arrest warrants. Identification and targeting of serious/ violent offenders, trouble spots.</p> <p>Community policing (examples): Problem-solving. Foot, bicycle, alternative patrols. Attending community meetings, working in partnership with residents and landlords. Youth activities and programs.</p>	<p>Hours open, staffing, activities of all programs</p> <p>Number and age of people participating in services, frequency, duration, outcome where appropriate.</p> <p>"Counts" of the number of events (e.g., sweeps), things (e.g., contraband items seized), people (e.g., serious chronic offenders), etc.</p> <p>Monthly arrest statistics from designated and comparison areas for similar crimes.</p> <p>Person-hours spent on community policing activities in the designated neighbourhood. Number of people regularly involved in community anti-crime/drug activities. Number and quality of crime tips received. CBO membership and participation.</p>	<p>Routine record-keeping implemented for NCLB.</p> <p>Routine record-keeping implemented for NCLB. Existing statistics from OPS.</p> <p>Routine record-keeping implemented for NCLB. Community survey and/or Interviews with community leaders/Neighbourhood Watch coordinators.</p>
<p>Physical Neighbourhood restoration (examples):</p>	<p>Number and nature of jobs created No. and characteristics of people employed.</p>	<p>Routine record-keeping implemented for NCLB.</p>

Job programs. Business recruitment and revitalization. Housing improvements. Clean-up, graffiti eradication. Code enforcement, garbage disposal. Construction of play structure	No. of new businesses opened, small business loans made, units rehabbed, etc. Nature and cost of neighbourhood improvements. No. of clean-ups, evictions, etc. Progress on the play-structure. No. of partners involved.	
Service		
Economic		

Examples of Documents to Gather

Minutes of all Steering Committee and subcommittee meetings, with attendance lists, positions and agencies of representatives.

Documents that put in writing the site's purpose and objectives, such as mission statements and formal goals and objectives.

Descriptive accounts of the site's history, such as funding proposals, grant applications, media coverage (e.g., local newspaper articles), annual reports, etc.

Program documents that relate to how the site operates. These may include such diverse things as the community action plan, inventory of resources, OPS study for Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), concept paper for a youth program to a draft proposal for a community activity.

Existing statistics on quality of life issues, social indicators (dropout rates, unemployment, etc.), and city and designated neighbourhood demographics. Strive to obtain objective information which enables you to compare pre- to post-NCLB conditions.

Step 2: Analysis and reporting

At this point, the NCLB coordinators/community developers will have collected the data that will form much of their pre/post case study, the data which encompasses a process evaluation of their NCLB activities.

It is a worthwhile exercise, at this point, to write the case study and discuss the process evaluation results among the Steering Committee and other stakeholders as appropriate. The process information and analysis of it should tell the Steering Committee:

- (1) Whether the NCLB partnership is functioning the best way possible,
- (2) Whether NCLB activities have been implemented as planned,
- (3) Whether NCLB activities are producing the desired immediate effects, and
- (4) Where improvements or changes are needed.

Areas to Cover in Stakeholder Interviews

1. The respondent's role in the NCLB process, particularly in policy setting, implementation, and day-to-day implementation of the community action plan.
2. Views of the membership of the Steering Committee, including who is essential, who is missing?
3. Partnership dynamics -- who leads, how decisions are made, how is conflict addressed, etc.
4. Views of key components and policies.
5. Views on community mobilization and participation.
6. Program strengths and weaknesses.
7. NCLB 's impact on the respondent's agency.
8. Local conditions, such as budget constraints, that impact the NCLB strategy.
9. Suggestions for changes and improvement in the strategy.

Assessing Program Impact

Step 1: Collect data

What? Gathering accurate and unbiased data related to program outcomes is arguably the most difficult part of evaluating an NCLB strategy. Again, outcomes are multiple and diverse, the information sources are many, and specific variables and indicators listed herein -- while significant and common -- are suggestions only.

A list of potential outcome measures appears in Table 3, which is an expanded version of Column 5 in the Conceptual Framework. Outcome measures and variables specific to a specific neighbourhood will flow from the identification of goals and objectives and the creation of a neighbourhood specific community action plan and conceptual framework.

How? Four major methods are suggested for gathering outcome data. The first two -- gathering statistics and conducting resident surveys -- are the most necessary for assessing program objectives.

The second two, gathering neighbourhood indicators and tracking/testing individuals, provide important information, but may be found only in the most well-funded and sophisticated of evaluations.

In neighbourhoods where crime prevention is a high priority for the residents, *gathering law enforcement and criminal justice system statistics* becomes a need and priority. Given the nature of the crime prevention activities, law enforcement, prosecution, and probation departments will be the main source of outcome data. From law enforcement sources, these data include calls for service and reported crime statistics. Prosecution sources can provide data on the number of serious offenders sentenced to prison terms. Probation and parole data include the number of probation/parole violations and returns to incarceration. If the neighbourhoods are Ottawa Community Housing communities, stats of the OCH security will also be helpful.

Table 3

Blueprint for Assessing Program Impact

Program Areas and Central Activities	Outcome Measures (Data to be collected)	General Sources of Data
Program Management: Steering Committee and subcommittee activities.	Partnership institutionalization. Expansion to new designated area. Partnership satisfaction.	Survey of Steering Committee members.
Social Crime prevention (examples): High visibility OPS patrols. Establishment of Neighbourhood Watch. Issuing trespassing tickets. Search/arrest warrants. Identification and targeting of serious/ violent offenders, trouble spots.	Drug and weapons-related, other target crimes (pre/post). Resident perceptions of fear of crimes, neighbourhood satisfaction, quality of life, police-community relations, police and city agency performance, etc. (pre/post changes). Victimization (self-reported). Physical changes in designated neighbourhoods. Probation/parole violations, returns to incarceration.	Existing statistics from police. Community surveys, community leaders interviews, focus groups. Existing victimization surveys.
Social Community policing (examples): Problem-solving. Foot, bicycle, alternative patrols. Attending community meetings, working in partnership with residents and landlords.	Ongoing community involvement. Resident perceptions of police, citizen-police relations, priority of neighbourhood problems. Resident perceptions of safety, increase in satisfaction with the neighbourhood. Positive use of public places.	Community surveys, key Community leaders interviews, focus groups. Systematic observations of physical changes made as a result of CPTED study.
Youth activities and programs.		
Physical Neighbourhood restoration: Job programs. Business recruitment and revitalization. Housing improvements. Clean-up, graffiti eradication. Code enforcement, garbage disposal. Construction of play structure	Changes in individuals' self- esteem, risk and protective factors, attitudes. Changes in dropout rates. Changes in vacancy and abandonment. Permanent jobs, new business. Improved physical and social quality of life. New construction, affordable housing. Increase in property values.	Routine testing by the concerned programs. Existing statistics from schools. Existing statistics from OCH, business associations, etc.

Remember that plans and agreements have to be made up front, not two or three years into strategy implementation. Possible statistics have to be tracked for the designated neighbourhoods and comparison areas, which may or may not fit other reporting areas.

If efforts begin by concentrating on mobilizing citizens and encouraging them to report crimes of all types, calls for service should increase over the next several months if citizens are responding. This doesn't indicate an increase in crime. Gradually, those calls for service should decrease and level off if the number of actual incidents decreases.

Neighbourhood surveys and systematic observations. Many of the desired outcomes of a NCLB strategy are to change neighbourhoods in positive ways. Some of these changes, such as a reduction in abandoned shopping carts, garbage around dumpsters and in streets, and graffiti, can be assessed by making regular observations using rating forms.

Changes in other outcomes, particularly significant ones such as fear and perceptions of the quality of neighbourhood life, must be assessed by asking the views of those who live and work in the designated neighbourhoods (to the extent that fear can be measured in residents' use of public spaces, systematic observations may be used as well).

Resident opinions may be gathered in many ways -- through telephone or door-to-door surveys, mailed questionnaires, focus groups, interviews with key community leaders, community meetings, brief questionnaires distributed and collected in public places, etc. The most objective method is to design the survey in simple language, make required translations, and let the community members fill up the survey forms without the help of interviewers. It is good to recruit independent interviewers for a lengthy and complex survey which needs to be conducted at the beginning of the program and then every 2-3 years thereafter.

It is worthwhile to conduct the survey in both the designated and comparison areas.

The questionnaire should be kept brief and simple, but should address quality of life measures, neighbourhood satisfaction, changes over time, social cohesion in the community, fear of crime, victimization, quality of city services, police-community relations, and perceptions of the police. Participation in the survey should be voluntary, anonymous (except for limited information gathered for verification purposes, if done), and fully informed. Sample survey instrument and observation forms are included at the end of this document.

Neighbourhood-wide indicators. As shown in Table 3, the NCLB strategy may be evaluated by its impact on neighbourhood life covered under the four broad, key components (Social, Physical, Service and Economic.-), by improvement in school attendance and the performance of neighbourhood youth, for example, or by the creation of new jobs or housing. In these cases, you will want to gather data about these outcomes that indicate changes attributable to the NCLB . These indicators (standardized achievement test scores, number of jobs created, etc.) should be gathered for periods prior to and after implementation of the NCLB strategy.

It is often difficult to obtain such indicator data at the neighbourhood level. In regard to school data, for example, neighbourhood youth certainly attend a variety of schools, and any one school will have only summary data that combines neighbourhood youth with others.

Other NCLB activities aim to improve individual behaviors and/or attitudes. Evaluating such activities might require assessing the target youth's self-esteem or a high risk youth's job readiness before and after their involvement in NCLB.

Step 2: Analysis and reporting

Statistical analyses and presentations of outcome data need to be conducted by an experienced researcher. Simple statistical tests of differences between means (such as the average satisfaction rating given to city services by a survey respondent) or observed outcomes (such as the number of people attending neighbourhood meetings) should be conducted to assess difference before and after implementation of the NCLB process and between the designated neighbourhoods and comparison areas.

Continuous data – meeting attendance data over a period of years, or the changes in a community's feeling of safety -- should be graphed to show changes in the designated neighbourhoods and comparison areas and perhaps tested by time series analysis.

Neighbourhood surveys will produce both quantitative information (e.g., a score from 1 to 5 on how safe the respondent feels alone in the neighbourhood after dark) and qualitative information (e.g., an answer to an open-ended question about how the neighbourhood has changed over the past year). As content analysis of open-ended questions can become laborious, it is recommended to stick to closed-ended questions as much as possible.

Putting It All Together

Now the tough part is writing all this up. The results of evaluation are important information for stakeholders, policy makers, staff, and funding agencies. It is good to begin with a concise written narrative of the neighbourhood profile, implementation, and operations -- in short, the case study. Add to it the immediate and long-term outcome data gathered, highlighting differences before and after major NCLB activities and differences between the designated neighbourhood(s) and comparison areas. Present quantitative results in simple tables, x-y graphs, bar graphs, and pie charts, with accompanying statistical tests where appropriate.

Through interviews with residents and stakeholders, individual anecdotes may provide a human touch the evaluation findings. Stories of how the neighbourhood has changed, while not "scientific," may be some of the evaluation's most powerful findings.

An evaluation report should end with a summary of progress, strengths and weaknesses, and activities yet to be accomplished. It may also include recommendations for changes in management, organization, or activities.

An evaluation report should fulfill multiple purposes. A summary of it will serve as the preface for funding proposals, annual reports to sponsors and funders, and informational materials given to the media and other interested parties.

This narrative summary should be updated periodically -- at least annually -- as policies, procedures, activities, and outcome data change. Second, the report should be used to strengthen the NCLB strategy.

The factual information compiled should be critically examined by the Steering Committee to see if revisions and mid-course corrections are needed. The Steering Committee should ask itself whether the NCLB activities have been provided as intended, what activities are missing and needed, whether the desired target population is being reached, etc. A good evaluation journey should be an enlightening and enjoyable experience.