UNDERSTAND WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Together, monitoring and evaluation are all about finding ways to make your program better by taking time to step back and reflect on what you're doing. In the context of developing and strengthening a land-based youth education program, it will help you evaluate your program by giving you the tools to both ask and answer questions like:

- *Is your program having the effect you want?*
- *Are you making progress on program goals and objectives?*
- *Could you be making better use of program resources?*

In order to work through these questions, you will need relevant, up-to-date information about your program. 'Monitoring' is the process of collecting that information, while 'evaluation' is the process of using it to assess progress and make decisions.

Making a list of all the activities you did in a four month period is an example of monitoring. Reviewing the activities you did in that period to figure out if there were any programming gaps or improvements you could make in the next four months is an example of evaluation. By regularly setting aside time to do both of these activities, you can establish a consistent habit of reflection and innovation for your program.

A 'consistent habit of reflection and innovation' is really just a way of thinking about your program that uses trial and error and experiential learning together with information and observation to figure out what works. When you take time to gather and interpret information about your program, you make space for coming up with new ideas and making adjustments based on what you learn. You also get a sense of where you're making progress on your goals and where you're coming up short, which can help you make better decisions about how you're using your resources and energy.

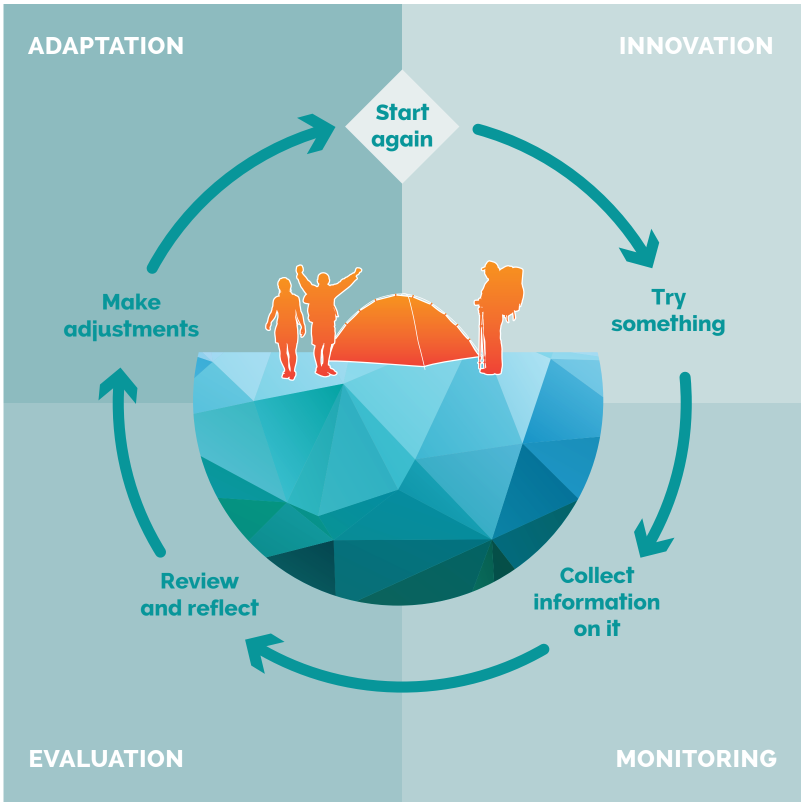

FIGURE: *Monitoring and Evaluation is the process of collecting program information and then stepping back to reflect on and understand your program's impact.*

In addition to supporting program improvement, regular program monitoring is also useful for:

- Sharing details about your program's activities and outcomes with your community and other program partners (including prospective partners);
- Reporting back to funders and sharing information about how program resources are being used;
- Creating future program plans that build on past work; and
- Making it possible for you to hand over the reigns to someone new, without that person having to start from scratch.

In short, there are lots of good reasons to include monitoring and evaluation as a key component of program design and implementation. Use the following steps to help you think through how to go about developing a simple monitoring plan to support your program.

CLARIFY YOUR PRIORITIES

Now that you have a better sense of why collecting information about your program is worthwhile, the next step is to start to identify some monitoring priorities. In other words, what information are you most interested in collecting? Why?

This will require doing some thinking about what it is that you want to know about your program. Here are some questions to consider as you think this through:

- *What information would be most useful for planning the program and innovating from one year to the next?*
- *What information would be helpful for someone to have on hand if they were taking over the coordinator position?*
- *Who else might be interested in knowing more about what's happening with the program? Community members? Chief and Council? Funders? Other partners?*
- *What would they be interested in knowing?*
- *Is there any other information that you are expected to keep track of for funding purposes?*

Be sure to write down your answers before moving on to the next step.

As you're starting to think through what information to collect, keep in mind that funding partners typically expect you to report back on how you used the funds they provided. Talk to your funders early on about what their reporting requirements are and how you can best meet them. Is there specific information you are expected to gather, or things they are interested in knowing about? If so, find out early on so you can come up with a monitoring plan that will help you keep track of the right information from the get go.

Here are some examples of things that funders often want to know at the end of a funding term or cycle:

- *How many youth participated in the program?*
- *How many volunteers helped out with the program?*
- *What kinds of activities were done?*
- *How were the funds spent (e.g., on transportation costs, food costs, salaries and honourariums, etc.)?*
- *How is the program benefiting participants (what difference is it making?)*

Photo: © Jason Houston

DECIDE WHAT INFORMATION TO COLLECT

The purpose of monitoring is to gather information that you can use to track (and share) your program's progress towards reaching its goals. To do this, you'll need to select some indicators.

An **indicator** is something observable and measurable that can be used to track change or progress. Indicators describe what, specifically, you will monitor.

There are two basic types of indicators: **output** indicators and **impact** indicators. Output indicators describe what you did and any direct results of that activity. Impact indicators are linked to program goals and describe the changes or outcomes that have taken place as a result of your program. The table below has more information on each of these.

Selecting indicators that are both relevant and practical can be challenging. If you're not sure where to start, you can use the following data collection tools to support program monitoring:

Output Monitoring Tools

- **School Program Report** (Tool 6A): If your program has a school component, use this tool to record program outputs from September to June.

TOOL 6A: School Program Report

- **Internship Program Report** (Tool 6B): If your program has an internship component, use this tool to record program outputs at the end of the internship season.

TOOL 6B: Internship Program Report

Impact Monitoring Tools

- **Program Participant Survey** (Tool 6C): Use this tool to gather information about your program's effectiveness and impacts, as reported by program participants (students).

TOOL 6C: Program Participant Survey

- **Teacher/Staff Survey** (Tool 6D): If your program has a school component, use this tool to gather information about the program's effectiveness and impact, as observed by teachers and staff.

TOOL 6D: Teacher/Staff Survey

OUTPUT INDICATORS	IMPACT INDICATORS
Measure the direct result of an activity or set of activities (e.g., program delivery) ***Typically describe frequency or intensity***	***Measure effectiveness or impact*** ***Usually try to capture changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour*** ***Typically more subjective***
• *The kinds of activities organized (e.g., overnight trips, day trips, classroom activities)* • *The number of activities organized (e.g., number of trips, number of classroom activities)* • *The number of students that participated* • *The number of community volunteers who helped out* • *The number of guest speakers that came to speak*	• *Changes in program participants' individual capacity (e.g., self confidence, social and communication skills)* • *Changes in program participants' health and wellbeing* • *Changes at the community level (e.g., community connectedness)* • *Participant perspectives on the effectiveness and/or value of the program*

If you're curious about how to do more comprehensive program impact monitoring, contact Nature United to find out more about the survey tools that they use to support SEAS program monitoring.

These tools are designed to help you gather relevant, useful information about your program as easily and efficiently as possible. However, if you're thinking about using them, make sure you review them first. Since every program is different, you may need to make some adjustments to better suit the monitoring priorities that are specific to your community/program.

Finally, if you choose to take a different approach (besides using the tools provided), you'll need to decide on some indicators and create your own supporting data collection and management tools (e.g., interview guides, surveys, Excel spreadsheets).

Remember, none of these tools are set in stone! You can use them as they are, or you can use them as templates for building data collection tools that are better suited to your specific program and information needs. Either way, just make sure that the information you end up collecting is relevant to *your* monitoring priorities, and that you're not spending a lot of time collecting information that you don't need or want.

SHARE YOUR RESULTS

After you've collected some information about your program, the next step is to share what you've learned with others. Start by figuring out who you plan to share your results with. In other words, who is your target audience? What information do you plan to share with this audience?

It's not uncommon to have more than one potential audience. Some examples of typical SEAS program target audiences include:

- Your program advisory committee
- Other members of your community
- Chief and Council
- An existing program or funding partner
- A potential program or funding partner

Once you've figured out who your target audiences are, spend some time getting to know the information you've collected so you can decide what to share with whom. As you become more familiar with your data, you will start to notice trends and patterns that can help you tell the story of your program. Your job at this stage is to figure out what information to include (e.g., in a report for an existing funding partner, a memo for Chief and Council, or a grant application). This will require looking at your data and making decisions about what is important enough to share.

Reporting to funding partners can be a lot of work, so be sure to only include information that is relevant and useful. Talk to your funding partners to determine how much detail is necessary. For example, if you are creating a report for a school program, does your funding partner want to know how many activities you did with each grade, or do they just want to know how many activities you did in total? Do they need to know details about each activity you did, or would they be satisfied with a general description of the *kinds* of activities you did? The answers to these kinds of questions will significantly influence how much time you spend working on your report, so take the time to have these conversations before you get started.

Some useful questions to consider as you think this through include:

- *What do my target audiences want to know about my program?*
- *If they haven't requested any specific information, what would they find useful?*
- *What do I want them to know? (in other words, what are the key things that I think are important to communicate about this program?)*

The last step is to find a way to effectively communicate the information you've decided to share. How you do this will again depend on your audience. For example, are they likely to be more interested in program outputs, impacts, or both? What about numbers, stories, or pictures? Do they need a lot of information, or just a few key highlights? The answers to these questions will help you figure out an appropriate format for sharing your results.

Finally, keep in mind that if you are preparing a report for a current program funder, there may be a reporting template that you're expected to follow, or specific information that you're expected to include.

EVALUATE YOUR PROGRAM

While sharing your results is a great way to communicate the value of your program to various audiences, the purpose of monitoring and evaluation is really to help you evaluate how your program is doing on the goals you've set for it. By taking time to reflect back on the progress your program has made, you can set yourself up to make informed decisions about how to adjust or improve it.

The first step is to come up with a plan for how you will undertake the evaluation process. One approach is to establish a program advisory committee whose job it is to come together once in a while to talk about whether the SEAS program is meeting its goals and make decisions about any changes that may be needed. This toolkit talks more about what this committee could look like and how to get people involved in Chapter 3.

If you have a program advisory committee in place, start by bringing this group together to undertake your first evaluation. If you *don't* have an advisory committee, you can still organize a program check-in meeting. Just be sure to invite key program stakeholders (i.e., anyone involved in program planning and decision making), and also make sure you are clear in advance about why you're holding the meeting.

Generally, program evaluation is the process of taking the information you've collected and using it to assess your program's progress in the focus or goal areas that you identified early on in program planning. The kinds of questions you'll want to explore as you undertake this process include:

- *Does our data show that our program is resulting in positive changes in the focus areas we identified during program design? In other words, are we making progress on our goals?*
- *If the answer is no, what challenges are we encountering? How can they be overcome?*
- *Do our goals or focus areas still reflect the needs of the community?*
- *What adjustments, if any, need to be made?*

If possible, send meeting participants a summary of your data collection results before you get together. This way, they'll have time to review the information ahead of time.


Photo: © Phil Charles

If you've already shared your results with another audience and you don't want to create extra work for yourself, share the materials you've already created. For example, if you've already prepared an annual report for a funding partner, you can go ahead and repurpose this report for your meeting. Just keep in mind that the purpose of this meeting is to evaluate your program's performance, so the information you're providing should be relevant to this purpose.

What happens at your evaluation meeting will depend on lots of different factors, such as who's there, how much people know about the program, if it has clearly defined goals, and so on. At the end of the day, what really matters is that you're taking time to discuss how things are going together as a group. Over time, if you keep meeting on a regular basis, this will help you ensure that your program is:

- On track to meet its goals;
- Making the best use of available resources;
- Adapting to challenges and changing circumstances; and
- Taking advantage of opportunities.

It will also help your community take ownership over your program.

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

By the end of this chapter, you should have:

- ✔ *Learned about monitoring and evaluation*
- ✔ *Thought about how it might be useful in your specific context*
- ✔ *Decided on some monitoring priorities*
- ✔ *Figured out if you are using the tools in this toolkit or taking a different approach*
- ✔ *Adapted the tools in this toolkit as needed*
- ✔ *Summarized the information you've collected and shared it with different audiences (e.g., Chief and Council, program funders)*
- ✔ *Used the information to make decisions about your program*