

Module 12

EVALUATION



One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intentions rather than their results.

Milton Friedman

Module 12

EVALUATION

What is it?

Planned assessment

Why do we do it?

To determine effectiveness of our interpretive efforts and areas for improvement

How do we do it?

With systematic examinations of interpretive programs

There is much to be learned from evaluating interpretation, if we only ask the right questions.

INTRODUCTION

From its Latin origin meaning 'to strengthen' or to empower, the term evaluation has taken a numerical turn—it is now largely about the measurement of things—and in the process can easily slip into becoming an end rather than a means. (Gitlan, Smyth 1989.) Keep in mind that **evaluation, or assessment, is just a tool that will empower you to present the most effective interpretive programs possible.**

Evaluation is a critical component of any interpretation. It links many of the pieces that we have discussed in other modules. Evaluation provides feedback in the communication process (*Module 3—Communication*), continues the planning cycle (*Module 4—Planning*), measures the benefits and values of programs (*Module 2—Purpose and Values*), and helps set the direction for the future (*Module 13—Professionalism*). This module will review the basic evaluation process, the purpose of evaluation, and the targets and sources of evaluation. Finally, it will examine some practical methods of conducting evaluation. It should be noted that while this module will focus on personal interpretation, nonpersonal interpretation (exhibits, displays, brochures, etc.) should also be regularly evaluated for effectiveness.

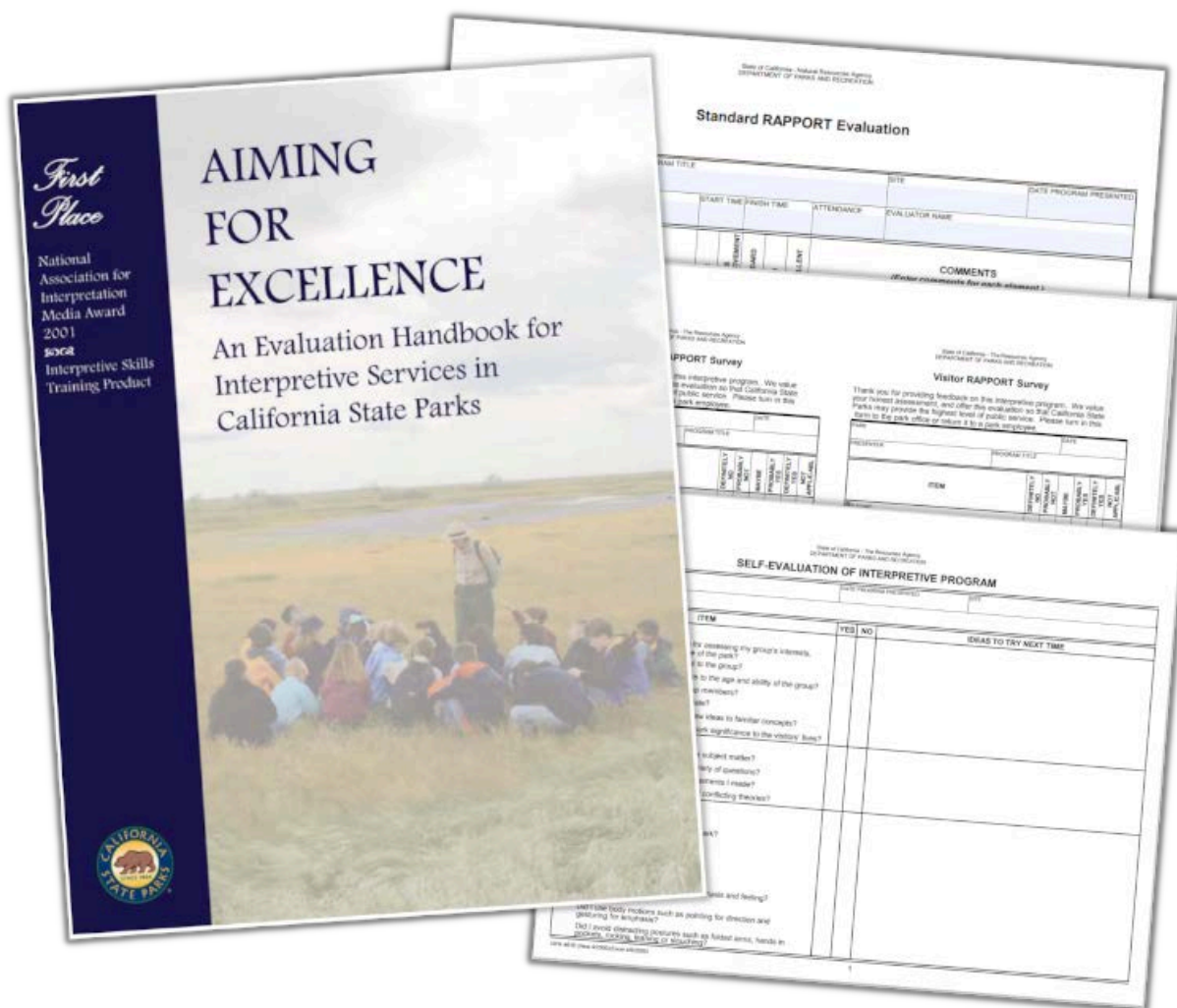
This module is intended to be used in conjunction with the *Aiming for Excellence* handbook (2006). In *Aiming for Excellence* you will find a detailed explanation of the RAPPORT system of evaluation used by California State Parks, as well as guidelines and methods (complete with forms) for evaluating your state park programs. While the

RAPPORT system is considered CSP's primary method of evaluation, other tools are available and should be part of a comprehensive evaluation program. In the following section, several of these are described.

The important thing to remember is that conducting meaningful evaluation is generally up to you, the interpreter. It is your responsibility to seek out assessment of your own programs. The value of your work is directly affected by the quality of your evaluation efforts.

All interpretive staff who present interpretive programs will have their program(s) evaluated a minimum of twice per year, including a minimum of one evaluation by an interpretive coordinator, lead person or supervisor using the Standard RAPPORT Evaluation DPR 461 form. Additional evaluations may be conducted using a variety of appropriate techniques.

Department of Parks and Recreation Policies, *Aiming for Excellence*



12.1 WHY

There are many purposes and benefits of conducting assessment. Each is important and provides insight into the overall success of interpretation. One of the main purposes is to increase program effectiveness. Because there are many elements that determine and influence a program's effectiveness, you must evaluate your program by using several different indicators.

The first step is to decide what you want to learn from your program evaluation. These goals and objectives must be identified before you can design the appropriate strategy or select evaluation tools. For example, if you are trying to assess the cost-effectiveness of programs, asking visitors how satisfied they are with programs will not yield appropriate or useful data.

To measure general program success, you might design an evaluation that will measure how well the program communicates with the audience, meets visitors' needs and promotes management goals. Evaluation measures, properly implemented, will identify the specific areas where improvement is needed. Program evaluations will also help you highlight successes. Without effective evaluation, it would be difficult to know what is working, for whom, and why.

Another key purpose of conducting evaluation is to improve your personal skills as an interpreter. **Evaluation can help you objectively assess your verbal and nonverbal communication skills and your ability to research, organize, and present a program.**

Evaluation should also be conducted to identify whether the goals and objectives of the program have been met. You have carefully created your program to address specific goals and objectives (see *Module 4—Planning*). Assessment allows for a critical analysis of whether you have met those targeted objectives—did your program accomplish what was intended?

Being able to justify budgets, measure cost-effectiveness, and demonstrate the financial benefits of interpretation are another positive aspect of evaluation, especially for administrators. The tighter the budget, the more important it is to convey the cost vs. benefits of interpretive services. Evaluations often provide data that is critical for fundraising and grant-seeking efforts.

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*The only man who behaves
sensibly is my tailor; he
takes my measurements
anew every time he sees me,
while all the rest go on with
their old measurements and
expect me to fit them.*
George Bernard Shaw

Lastly, data from evaluations helps identify training priorities. What needs to be improved to gain better understanding from the audience? Are there skills that the interpreter could use help with?

WHY CONDUCT EVALUATIONS?

- Increase program effectiveness.
 - Determine if visitors' needs are met.
 - Assess if program goals and objectives are met.
 - Assess interpreter's effectiveness.
 - Establish professional legitimacy.
 - Measure cost-effectiveness.
 - Provide interpretive budget justification.
 - Identify training priorities.
 - Celebrate your successes.
 - Provide data for fundraising and grant application.
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12.2 WHAT

Once you have determined what it is that you want to learn from your evaluation, the next step is to decide where you will need to focus your attention. Which parts of the program should you focus on to gather the most useful data?

As discussed in *Module 3—Communications*, the “whole” of the interpretive experience is influenced by the interpreter, the audience and the program. Thorough evaluations must consider each of these elements to gain a true picture. For example, the interpreter could be a fabulous communicator and entertain the audience very well. However, without a meaningful message, the “whole” of the interpretive service would fall short. Conversely, the program could be technically “accurate” but be performed in a monotone by a lifeless interpreter. Once again, the “whole” of the interpretive service would be less than desired. As a result, when conducting evaluation, it is important to examine the elements from various perspectives. We will return to this discussion later in the module.

WHAT SHOULD BE EVALUATED?		
<u>Interpreter</u>	<u>Audience</u>	<u>Program</u>
Body language	Satisfaction	Relevant
Appearance	Enjoyment	Accurate
Enthusiasm	Behavior change	Provocative/enjoyable
Credibility	Emotional impact	Programmatically
Subject matter	Attention	accessible
Voice quality	Memory	Organized
Eye contact	Learning	Retained
Confidence	Attendance	Thematic
Grammar		Cost-effective

FOCUS ON THE INTERPRETER

The interpreter controls program delivery and content and interacts directly with the audience. Therefore, examining the interpreter is a critical component of all evaluation of interpretive services. The DPR 461 series of forms will assist with this, whether the interpreter is a ranger, volunteer, or seasonal employee.

Evaluations of the interpreter should include verbal and nonverbal communication techniques and skills, interpersonal interactions with the audience and expertise in and ability to address the department's elements of RAPPORT.



Continuous assessment will help you and your volunteers develop a quality program.

FOCUS ON THE AUDIENCE

The audience is anyone who receives interpretive services. It might be a group of school children, kids at a Junior Ranger Program, a mixed-age audience at a campfire program or general visitors encountered during roving. **Attendance, attention, satisfaction, and recall are some of the most common elements evaluated when focusing on the audience.**

Always take care when collecting data to ensure the information will be useful. For example, the number

of people attending the program is probably the most common form of data collected. It is easy to assess and gives some indication of the program's success. While it reflects attendance levels and examined over time, could yield useful patterns, it does not necessarily provide the most valuable data. Popular programs do not necessarily equal effective programs. A critical question of evaluation should be, "Is the program effective?" Who better to answer that question than the audience? Since satisfaction, program objectives, and overall success of interpretation are judged based on the target audience, audience evaluations are a critical component of interpretive assessment.

FOCUS ON THE PROGRAM

The third target for evaluation is the program itself. Whether it is a formal, school-based program or an informal roving contact, your communications have a purpose, that is stated goals and objectives. By evaluating the program, you can find out how well you met those goals. You can also gather information about visitor accessibility, relevance, organization, cost-effectiveness, and overall audience satisfaction.

12.3 WHEN

There are three basic times to conduct evaluation: before, during, and after the program. We will discuss these, and how to incorporate all three in an evaluation strategy.

BEFORE (FRONT-END)

Evaluation conducted before the program is called front-end, and it occurs during the planning stages. It involves research and careful planning to select the topic, theme, target audience, method of delivery, and goals/objectives of the program. Front-end evaluation is similar to a needs assessment where target audience needs, wants, and goals are examined and programs

are matched accordingly (DeGraaf, et al., 1999). This stage of the process is critical for evaluating the program in the later stages. It is in this front-end planning stage that the direction, goals, and objectives for the program are established. These goals and objectives, written in WAMS style (see *Module 4—Planning*), are the very indicators used to evaluate effectiveness in the later stages of evaluation.

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The most serious mistakes are not being made as a result of wrong answers. The truly dangerous thing is asking the wrong question.

Peter Drucker
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DURING (FORMATIVE)

Formative evaluation occurs during the program and is often used by interpreters to discover if the program is going well. It occurs naturally when we watch body language, facial expressions, and other cues that indicate whether our communication is effective. Visitors' eye contact and questions are frequently used for formative assessment. Although these are not very scientific, they are classic examples of assessing interpretation during the program.

AFTER (SUMMATIVE)

Summative evaluation could occur at the end of an individual program or after an entire interpretive season. For example, a manager might consider all evaluations occurring during the season to be formative and only end-of-the-year, cumulative assessments to be summative.

Summative evaluation conducted at the end of an individual program is beneficial for discovering the impact of a program. Impact assessment will help you determine whether the program is worth the time and money spent on it. Program effectiveness can be partially judged based on whether or not the outcomes matched the objectives of the program. If the answer is no, modifications to the objectives, the program, the target

audience, the interpreter, or the program are in order. Thorough evaluation will make it clear which should be modified.

CLOSING THE LOOP (MODIFICATION)

Once a program has been evaluated, it is time to use that information. Monitoring and evaluation are part of a cyclical process. Once you have assessment data, you can make changes in your program to better meet your goals. It is also time to celebrate your strengths and recognize your weak areas as an interpreter.

Evaluations can suggest program modifications, give statistical summaries, and provide information for year-end reports regarding the products, successes, and satisfactions with interpretive efforts. They may provide results that were not expected. For example, in *Making the Grade* (2002), an analysis of California State Parks' school group programs (1998-2002), one of the primary conclusions was that the evaluation forms for school groups should be modified. These results, although not the target information sought from the survey, were still very helpful as they served to improve the evaluation process in the future.

Putting it all together—an example

Front-end (before)

- Outline goals and objectives during the planning process
- Determine target audience based on research
- Identify messages and themes that meet audience needs and fulfill goals and objectives.

Formative (during the program)

- Assess interpreter's communication characteristics
- Examine audience reactions to the program
- Analyze messages and themes to determine if appropriate for audience needs.

Summative (after)

- Examine audience's message retention and recall
- Conduct self-assessments
- Assess behavioral impact of the program
- Determine training needed (if any)

Closing the Loop (modification)

- Make needed modifications to program, delivery, and assessment methods
- Re-evaluate program goals and objectives.
- Complete training if necessary

12.4 WHO

Who should provide the feedback data for your evaluation? The audience, supervisor, peer, expert, or interpretive team can all be providers of evaluation data. Each of these evaluators may use different methods and strategies of assessment. Self-evaluations are also extremely valuable.

EVALUATION BY YOUR AUDIENCE

Audience members provide feedback and evaluation of interpretation through their body language, questions, and written and verbal comments. The audience may be especially effective at telling us if program goals and objectives were met, if their needs were addressed, if the program itself was effective, and their overall satisfaction level. This feedback is usually initiated and facilitated by someone other than the audience, such as the interpreter, supervisor or expert evaluator.

Although anyone can initiate evaluations, it is your responsibility to ensure that it occurs. *Aiming for Excellence* offers an assessment tool, the Visitor RAPPORT Survey (DPR 461A) that permits the audience to evaluate both the interpreter and the program. There is also a standardized CSP School Group Evaluation Form available for your use. Remember that the quality of the feedback is only as good as the methods used to collect it.

EVALUATION BY YOUR SUPERVISOR

A supervisor or Field Training Officer (FTO) assessment is very beneficial. This type of evaluation is often more objective than that provided by an audience. It can provide insights into the program's effectiveness, the interpreter's skills and abilities, audience reactions, and how well the program meets Department and program goals and objectives. Supervisory evaluation typically occurs at specific intervals throughout an interpretive season and is typically tied to the RAPPORT system.

Since a supervisor's evaluations may influence job performance assessment in addition to improving program effectiveness, it can be intimidating. Nevertheless, it is in your best interest to seek out opportunities for your supervisor to evaluate you. Your supervisor will discuss the results with you, provide a written evaluation, and issue a follow-up report. Supervisory evaluations are geared toward coaching you through the developmental stages of your interpretive career. Use the feedback and coaching from supervisors to help improve your interpretive techniques, skills, and abilities.

EVALUATION BY YOUR PEER

Peer evaluation occurs when a colleague conducts the evaluation. Useful on many levels and highly recommended, these evaluations can increase overall effectiveness, build collegiality, enhance comprehensive knowledge of the resource, and provide nonthreatening feedback. It is important to outline the parameter of the evaluation ahead of time. Discuss what you expect, establish a “game plan,” and whether you would like oral and/or written comments, whether you’d like them to use the DPR 461 or a different tool. Peers can also attend the program as members of the general audience and observe visitor reactions and comments throughout the program. This unsolicited audience feedback can provide authentic insight into program and interpreter effectiveness. Be sure to provide specific criteria for your peer to examine.

EVALUATION BY AN EXPERT

Professional evaluators, researchers, or statisticians perform expert and objective evaluations. These professionals have the advantage of being neutral and are more often able to recognize problems or issues that may be overlooked by peers or supervisors. There are many methods and strategies for expert evaluation, including in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations, and surveys. Expert evaluations are typically more costly and time consuming than other types of evaluations. However, the precision and quality of the information is often worth the cost. Often your District Interpretive Specialist can provide expert evaluations.

EVALUATION BY A TEAM

Team evaluation is another form of assessment conducted in California State Parks. In fact, “It is recommended that each district form a District Interpretive Planning and Improvement Team (IPIT)...whose primary role is to facilitate the ongoing improvement of the district’s entire interpretive program.” IPIT evaluation is beneficial for its broad range of opinions and perspectives, the collegiality it builds, and the enhancement

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*...every performance, every
summer season, every service,
and the entire program
merits some kind of serious,
systematic, open, fair analysis...*

Douglas Knudson, Ted Cable,
and Larry Beck

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it encourages for conducting mission-driven interpretation. In some districts, the IPIT may have another operating name, so seek it out.

SELF-EVALUATION

Interpreters themselves must also initiate evaluations. As the interpreter, you have the primary responsibility to evaluate your programs, yourself, and audience reactions to and satisfaction with the interpretation. This “self-evaluation” can

be very efficient and non-threatening. *Aiming for Excellence* provides a self-evaluation form (DPR 461D) using the RAPPORT criteria.

The remaining sections of this module will review and discuss other practical and effective methods that you can implement in order to evaluate the effectiveness of personal interpretive services.

Each district should have a District Interpretive Improvement Team (DIIT).



12.5 HOW

TRADITIONAL VS. SCIENTIFIC

As you know by now, there are numerous methods for conducting evaluations, ranging from rigorous scientific surveys to casual observations of visitors' behavior. In fact, most authors in literature make two classic distinctions of assessment methods: traditional and scientific. There have been many debates regarding the appropriateness of rigorous scientific assessment versus the more traditional, gut-level impressions about programs. This is similar to the discussion of whether or not interpretation is an art or a science.

Many interpreters agree with William Lewis that “after having observed, practiced, and coached interpretation in parks for more than thirty years, that the gut-level type of evaluation is satisfactory for more purposes” (Lewis, 1986, p. 110). **Seeing the sparkle in the eyes of visitors and sensing the enthusiasm in the audience are both “traditional” methods of evaluation.** Interpreters who have worked for any length of time can tell you when their programs went well. These “traditional” proponents view scientific evaluation as minimizing the true impact and effect of interpretation on the heart and mind of the individual. After all, we are exposing the “soul of a thing” (Tilden, 1977) to the heart of a person. How can this be measured, and does not the mere attempt to assess it degrade the spirituality of it? How can you measure and quantify art?

Interpreters that align more closely with the scientific forms of evaluation agree that, “current emphasis on accountability means interpretation must justify the time, money, equipment, and personnel it requires” (Sharpe, G., and Sharpe, W., 1986, p. 97). This position asserts that interpretation may be spiritual in nature, but it must also be accountable to the people it serves, the agency it represents, and the resources it interprets. Just as ministers or priests may be “called” to the church, they still try to accomplish specific goals and are periodically evaluated on their effectiveness in meeting those goals. It does not lessen their spirituality, but it is an indicator of their commitment and dedication to it.

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Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.

Albert Einstein

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Scientific evaluation provides defensible results with rigorous, tangible outcomes as opposed to the more traditional methods of assessment. For example, your gut-level feeling about your program is not easily demonstrated to a supervisor nor is it an adequate justification for an increase in budget. Scientific assessment is a more accurate and representative measure of effectiveness.

While both traditional and scientific evaluations have value, it is the position of California State Parks that evaluation be conducted in a systematic, consistent manner.

“Interpretive services in California State Parks play a key role in the organization’s mission—inspiring and educating the people of California and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation. Measurement of the success of that mission is critical to maintaining support for interpretive services. Therefore, it is imperative that evaluations take place in a consistent and systematic way” (*Aiming for Excellence*, p. vii).

TRADITIONAL EVALUATION	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides immediate feedback • Easy to implement • Requires little training • Based on intuition and gut feeling of interpreter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often inaccurate and unreliable • Biased • Based on emotion and feeling • Provides no distinction between entertainment and interpretation

SCIENTIFIC EVALUATION	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generates definitive evidence of effectiveness • Respected by researchers and administrators • Results in quantifiable data • Allows for precise measurement of interpretive services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires money, time, and expertise • Difficult to collect, tabulate, and analyze • Unable to quantify intangibles • Field application of results is often difficult

There are clearly merits to each evaluative approach and a time and place for each method. Both methods should be used to gain the most accurate “total” picture of the effectiveness of interpretation in your park. As we have just discussed, the most appropriate methods for conducting an evaluation depend on the answers to many questions such as: Who is conducting the evaluation? What is being evaluated? When will the evaluation take place? They also depend on many other issues, such as

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Since an objective of any park administration is to improve the quality of park use, the effectiveness of our interpretive program is a major concern of all administrators.

George Hartzog

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money, time, and the expertise available. **Let us proceed with the practical realization that you, as a park interpreter, have no money, know very little about evaluation, and are already feeling overwhelmed with the amount of work you have to do. So how can you possibly conduct quality evaluation?**

OBJECTIVE-BASED ASSESSMENT

In *Module 4—Planning*, you practiced developing objectives for your program. You may recall that there were three basic types of objectives for interpretive programs: cognitive, behavioral, and affective. Different methods of assessment can be applied to each type of objective.

Cognitive Objectives

Cognitive objectives involve the understanding, information transfer, and/or learning that occurs based on the program. An example of this would be: *During a quiz at the end of the program, 80 percent of randomly selected visitors will correctly identify two reasons to protect tide pools.* One of the classic methods of measuring cognitive objectives is

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*...we need to spend more time
developing program objectives.*

*Objectives are an essential precursor
to evaluation. Without carefully written
objectives, it is next to impossible to
interpret the results of evaluation.*

Maureen McDonough

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through pre/post assessment. Knowledge is measured before and after exposure to a program to determine if a difference exists. When evaluated correctly, the increase in knowledge after exposure to the program can be attributed to the program. This information can be used to document meeting (or not meeting) the objectives. This is one of the most common forms of assessment, primarily due to the ease of data collection and the tangible results produced.

The DPR 461 (Standard RAPPORT Evaluation), DPR 461A (Visitor RAPPORT Survey), and School Group Program Evaluation each provide some questions that assess cognitive aspects of the program. Following are some additional easy techniques that you can implement to demonstrate program effectiveness in meeting cognitive objectives.

Cognitive Objective Assessment Techniques

- **Oral quizzes**—Learning can be easily assessed before, during, or after a program by having a quiz. Quizzes provide enjoyment, hands-on participation and social interaction, and allow for assessment. Divide visitors into teams, or have them participate as individuals. Postcards, pencils, or other appropriate items can be used as “prizes.” Quizzes may involve answers to questions or identification of objects, smells, etc. Use your imagination to make the evaluation part of the program fun.
- **Pre/post written responses**—This is a very useful method to assess cognitive objectives. Have two colors (for our example, yellow and green) of 3 x 5 index cards, and hand out one card of each color and a pencil to each individual at the start of the program. After your introduction, ask visitors to put the last three digits of their phone number in the top left corner of both cards. This is so you can match the two cards later. Have them write the answer to a question(s) you ask at the start of the program on the green card and collect them. Conduct the program as planned, and repeat the question(s) at the end of the program. Have them record their responses on the other card. After the program, the cards can be matched, using the numbers, to assess any increase in knowledge. Note: If there are children in the group too young to meaningfully participate, have them draw a picture of something from the program before and after. In addition, letting visitors keep the pencil is a nice touch and helps build public support and agency recognition.
- **Review questions**—Similar to the above methods is the use of review questions during and after the program. Ask questions to assess visitors' knowledge levels of information presented during the program. These can be conducted formally or informally as the program proceeds. For example, on the return after a guided walk, ask visitors questions about information covered during the walk. Remember that your audience is non-captive; that is, they are there for fun and enjoyment, not a grade or degree and question them appropriately.
- **Response or comment cards**—Response or comment cards (see box on the next page) are not only beneficial for measuring cognitive objectives but effectiveness as well. *Aiming for Excellence* has several good examples. Response cards are designed to measure how well the program meets performance objectives. They are easy, convenient, and effective measures that first-time interpreters can implement.

COGNITIVE OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT—AN EXAMPLE:

Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park

Please help us improve the quality of our interpretation.

1. What was the main point or message of the program?
2. How did you find out about the program?
3. What did you enjoy most about the program?
4. What did you enjoy least?
5. What is the Save the Redwoods League?

Thank you for your time!

Cognitive Objective Assessment Tips

- **Keep it random**—When you distribute response cards or choose visitors to survey, do it randomly. Asking every fifth person, every other person, etc. produces results more reflective of the entire population of users.
- **Keep it short**—Do not ask more than five questions in any data collection method or from any visitor. Too much data will be difficult to tabulate and analyze. In addition, visitors are on vacation and should not be needlessly disrupted from their recreational experience. This also forces you to carefully select the questions.
- **Make it convenient**—Provide multiple drop-off points for any written data. Make it easy and anonymous for visitors to return the information.
- **Assess throughout the season**—Conduct evaluations throughout the interpretive season. This information can be used very effectively to show patterns and changes.
- **Keep it small**—For written surveys, keep the actual paper small and unimposing. Postcard sized surveys are great!
- **If oral, provide method of recording**—Have a coworker or friend available to discreetly record answers to any oral methods of assessment. If that is not possible, “placeholders” can be used to serve to keep track of answers (For example, move coins from one pocket to another in between contacts to signify the number of correct responses.)
- **Mix it up**—Incorporate before and after assessment methods to determine the cognitive impact of programs.

Behavioral Objectives

Behavioral objectives focus on the physical behaviors of visitors. For example, “50 percent of visitors will take a brochure on tide pool protection.” One of the classic methods of measuring this type of objective is by observation. The key to implementing and measuring behavioral objectives is to ensure that observation is easy, practical, and discreet, and can reveal the targeted behavior. Recognize that you may have class, age, cultural, or other biases that may influence the results of your observations,

Creating the right objective can be challenging. For example, if the desired behavior is to “protect” the resource, then what behaviors will you tangibly measure? **Objectives must be stated in terms of observable phenomena.** Often interpreters try to measure program success by assessing behaviors that are hard to observe or cannot be directly connected with program exposure. The box on the next page presents some simple tips for conducting evaluation based on behavioral objectives.



Behavioral objective: 50% of walk attendees will take a brochure home.

BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENTS—AN EXAMPLE

Your program's objective is to get people to leave less litter on the ground in your park. One way to measure success would be to observe visitors' responses to a "planted" piece of garbage.

For example, before the program, have a non-uniformed volunteer observe random visitors in the parking lot and their response to a "planted" piece of trash. How many visitors walk by the trash before someone picks it up? If 40 visitors walk by before someone picks it up, this might be a general average for this behavior—one out of 40 visitors will pick up trash. Repeat this several times to get a true average for the behavior.

After the program, again count how many visitors walk by before someone picks up the same type of "planted" trash. If only 10 program attendees walk by the garbage before someone picks it up, then the program may have reduced the average to one out of 10 visitors. This produces a tangible behavioral result from the program.

This is not statistically defensible data, but it does yield practical results. When repeated regularly and averaged over time, it can produce meaningful results of our interpretive efforts.

Behavioral Objective Assessment Tips

- **Conduct random observations of visitors**—Randomly choose times, places, and visitors, such as every fifth person, every other day, every other parking lot, etc. This produces results more reflective of the general population of park users.
- **Implement pre/post observations**—Observations of random visitors in the park can be compared to random observations of visitors exposed to the program to determine a "difference" due to exposure.
- **Target only specific observations**—Keep observations very specific and manageable. Do not conduct observations of "resource protection." These observations are often too general to be very useful. Instead, determine what specific behaviors reflect resource protection.
- **Assess behavior during the program**—Conduct observations during or immediately after the program. Assessments should be linked as closely as possible to the time of exposure to the program.

- **Observe evidence of behavior**—Sometimes it is easier and more discreet to observe the evidence of the behavior. For example, instead of watching visitors pick up trash, count the number of pieces of planted litter along a trail before and after the program.
- **Be sure the behavior is observable**—If the desired behavior is to get your audience to care about your park resources, then you will want to observe and assess that behavior. How do you think this could be done?

Affective Objectives

Affective objectives focus on the emotional impact of programs. The goal is for visitors to care, to support, to feel, and to be changed by the emotional impact of the resource and our programs. **This is one of the most powerful types of program objectives, but also one of the most difficult to assess.** “Visitors randomly surveyed before the program compared to those surveyed after will demonstrate a 20 percent increase in positive feelings that tide pools should be protected,” is an example of an affective objective. One of the classic methods of measuring this type of an objective is a self-report of emotion. The Visitor RAPPORT Survey (DPR 461A) is an example of allowing visitors to report on how they feel about programs.

Observations can also be used to measure targeted affective objectives. For example, the number of visitors purchasing books or taking brochures about the program topic after exposure to it could assess whether visitors care about the topic. Keep it simple and be sure that observations or self-report measures reflect the targeted emotions. Tips and techniques for conducting this type of evaluation are similar to the strategies we reviewed for cognitive and behavioral objectives.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The most effective evaluations combine several methods of data gathering. Because each method has strengths and weaknesses associated with it, evaluation through multiple assessment strategies will produce a more accurate assessment of program effectiveness. This is called “triangulation.” Triangulation is used to increase overall accuracy.

For example, if three separate methods are implemented to assess meeting program objectives and all three produce similar results, this is a clearer result than if only one method was used. Different methods can be used within one program or across the season of the program to produce a summative evaluation. Regardless of the approach, increased accuracy will be achieved if multiple methods are used (see box on next page).

Cost Effectiveness

Like it or not, budgets drive much of the practical ability for parks to conduct interpretation. Determining cost effectiveness can be a significant contributor when providing budget justifications (Roggenbuck and Propst, 1981; Machlis, 1986). However, assigning a dollar figure to the worth of interpretation is a double-edged sword. Although it often provides a tangible measure, many would argue that you cannot place a dollar value on intangibles, such as inspiration or provocation. Although that may be true, you can place a value on some of the outputs. For example, cost effectiveness can be measured in the reduction of litter after a program and the budgetary savings of reduced cleanup hours spent by personnel. In addition, an increase in book sales after a program on the same topic can provide a good measure of cost benefit.

In addition to measuring output, the cost effectiveness of a program can also be evaluated by assessing input. For example, the hours spent preparing and delivering a program can be converted into the equivalent amount of salary (\$P) and then divided by the total number of people contacted in the program (N) to determine the cost per individual visitor ($\$P/N$) of the program. This measure, coupled with any discernible outputs in dollar figures, can provide a compelling picture of the cost effectiveness of a program.

EVALUATION STRATEGY—AN EXAMPLE

PROGRAM

Afternoon tide pool walk.

Theme

Tide pool life strives to survive with each changing tide.

Goals

1. Increase visitor satisfaction with the experience of exploring tide pools.
2. Promote tide pool protection.
3. Increase visitor knowledge about the fragile nature of tide pools.

Objectives

1. Visitors surveyed randomly before and after the program will demonstrate a 20 percent increase in positive feelings that tide pools should be protected.
2. 70 percent of randomly surveyed visitors responding to the general park satisfaction survey will indicate positive satisfaction levels with the program.
3. 80 percent of visitors asked will correctly identify two reasons to protect tide pools.

The following methods would be implemented throughout the entire season.

Audience

1. Have randomly selected visitors complete comment cards regarding tide pool objectives.
2. Implement the Visitor RAPPORT Survey (DPR 461A).

Peer

1. Observe visitor behavior and comments during and after the program, specifically examining protection behaviors and overall satisfaction comments.
2. Use/complete Standard RAPPORT Evaluation (DPR 461).

Supervisor

1. Use/complete Standard RAPPORT Evaluation (DPR 461).
2. Invite supervisors to your program early in the season, the middle, and near the end, so they can see the improvements made based on their feedback.

Interpreter

1. Conduct self-evaluations throughout the season using Self-Evaluation of Interpretive Programs (DPR 461D).
2. Observe visitor behavior at the tide pools before and after your programs.
3. Collect attendance levels at all programs.

This outline provides a strategy for evaluating the program that reflects many different points of view, times throughout the season, and purposes for the evaluation. By conducting an evaluation that relies on more than one method, you gain greater insight into the true success of your program. No one method is perfect, but together several different ones can provide a better picture of the interpretive services you provide.

As you can see in the box above, RAPPORT evaluation forms provide a method of “pulling it all together.” Because they are based on the primary criteria of effective interpretation (*Module 3—Communications*), the DPR 461 series helps to measure a program’s success on many levels. In addition, the series can be used by interpreters, supervisors, peers, and the audience. They expose overall visitor satisfaction, meet visitor needs and objectives, and assess program and interpreter effectiveness.

12.6 REPORTING

Another aspect of conducting evaluation is documenting the results for supervisors and administrators. Reporting should be simple, brief, and directly related to the documented information. The primary use of this information is to help you, the interpreter, increase effectiveness. However, since you are collecting the information, it may as well demonstrate your effectiveness to others. Reporting should include program summaries, outlines, objectives, attendance levels, and summaries of assessment measures used. For example, you could simply include an outline of the box on pages 483-484 and the results from each of the methods used throughout the season.

Be sure to keep a copy of all your reports and reporting procedures for your own records. Do not forget to place a copy of the reports in the individual program folders created in the planning stage (see *Module 3—Communications*). This information will be very useful to future interpreters.

Evaluation is an extremely useful tool to indicate program effectiveness, encourage interpreter development and growth, and further the mission of the Department. When asked why you are conducting an interpretive program, you should now be able to answer and clearly demonstrate your effectiveness in meeting those goals.

WHAT'S AHEAD?

We have completed our journey in understanding what interpretation is, how to conduct various program types, and finally how to evaluate the success of our efforts. Now we turn to the profession and its future. What does it mean to be an interpreter? What are the responsibilities of the profession, and what role do interpreters play to ensure further development of the discipline? In *Module 13—Professionalism* we will discuss these and other issues facing the profession of interpretation.

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Module 12

EVALUATION

SELF ASSESSMENT

Answer each question in the section below before reviewing the material in *Module 12—Evaluation*. The answers are not provided. Check your answers with your colleagues and as you read *Module 12—Evaluation*. Items from the self assessment may be reviewed and discussed in class.

- 1) What is *Aiming for Excellence*?

- 2) List four reasons why we should conduct evaluation of interpretive programs.

1.

2.

3.

4.

- 3) When conducting evaluation of personal interpretive services, what specific types of things should be evaluated?

- 4) What is the DPR 461?

- 5) When should evaluation be conducted?

- 6) RAPPORT criteria form the basis of much of the evaluation in California State Parks.
(Explain your answer.)

- a) True
- b) False

7) Name two benefits of having an expert provide the evaluation.

1. _____

2. _____

8) Evaluation of interpretive performances should be conducted by a supervisor.
(Explain your answer.)

a) True

b) False

9) What is self evaluation?

10) Describe one method to assess learning based on program objectives.

11) To save time, you should only distribute surveys to visitors who you think will fill them out. (Explain your answer.)

- a) True
- b) False

12) You should have only one drop-off point for surveys. (Explain your answer.)

- a) True
- b) False

13) When measuring the behavioral impact of a program, which of the following are recommended practices? (Check all that apply.)

- a) Assess general, not specific, behavior
- b) Conduct random observations of visitors
- c) Observe evidence of behaviors
- d) Practice discreet observations

14) It is impossible to assess the emotional impact of a program. (Explain your answer.)

- a) True
- b) False

15) What is triangulation?

Now that you have completed the self assessment questions, review the material in *Module 12—Evaluation* to confirm your answers. After reading the module, move on to the workbook learning activities, which will assist you in developing your skills.

WORKBOOK LEARNING ACTIVITIES

To help you review and apply the material covered in *Module 12—Evaluation*, a selection of review questions and/or activities is provided. Again, no answers are included. Use the material from the module, outside sources, and your colleagues to help you complete the activities and answer the questions. There may be more than one right answer. Use the questions and activities to generate discussion about the material. Be prepared to discuss, perform, or demonstrate your answers in class.

- 1) You designed an interpretive program to educate visitors about two primary reasons to protect the resources in the park. Describe two methods you can use to demonstrate your effectiveness in meeting your program goals. Describe an additional method you could use to assess your effectiveness as an interpreter for this program.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

- 2) A common goal for interpretation is provocation. Describe one way you can observe and measure if your program was provocative.

- 3) What do you think is the most important reason to conduct evaluation in your park?

- 4) You are busy and have many duties to perform in the course of a day. What steps can you take to ensure evaluation will not fall by the wayside?

Take it to YOUR Park

Answer each question with the information specific to your park. You will have to conduct some research in order to answer each question. Use the answers as a guide for enhancing your career in California State Parks.

EVALUATION

Park name: _____

- 1) Describe how you can use triangulation to evaluate a program you designed in one of the previous modules.

- 2) Create an evaluation strategy for a program you are designing in your park. Be sure that it contains front-end, formative, and summative elements.
