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Using Logic Models for Strategic Planning and Evaluation

Application to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

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Prepared for the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
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The mission of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) is “to prevent premature death and disability and to reduce the human suffering and medical costs caused by injuries.”¹ NCIPC accomplishes its mission through surveillance, intra- and extramural research, and program development and implementation.

Like all federal programs, NCIPC must comply with the terms of the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993 and carry out regular reviews using the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART). PART provides a basis for evaluating programs’ performance through a series of questions devoted to purpose and design, strategic planning, management, and results and accountability. NCIPC will commence its PART review in the spring of 2006.

As part of a larger effort to implement sustainable, ongoing strategic planning and evaluation processes, NCIPC sought RAND’s assistance in developing its strategic plan, including goals and measures, and preparing for its upcoming PART review. NCIPC asked RAND to build on previous analyses that RAND has conducted for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and other federal agencies and programs. This report shows how NCIPC can use logic modeling to meet its immediate needs, i.e., to develop goals and measures for its strategic plan and prepare for its PART review, and to implement sustainable, ongoing strategic planning and evaluation processes. Drawing on the results of past analyses, this report emphasizes the use of a “logic model template” that incorporates operations and strategy.

**Strategic Planning**

In assisting NCIPC, much of our effort involved the development of NCIPC-tailored logic models. Our work with NCIPC and other federal agencies and programs indicates that logic models can serve at least two distinct yet related planning functions: First, they can serve as a means of communicating with internal and external audiences; and second, they can serve as planning tools. As planning tools, logic models can provide a framework for articulating and aligning operations, goals, and measures. In this role, the logic model can serve as a foundation for developing a strategic plan.

To assist NCIPC in strategic planning, this report presents and illustrates a replicable process for developing NCIPC-tailored logic models; the process involves tracing the path of

NCIPC operations and then adding goals and measures to support the program’s mission. For an existing program, such as NCIPC, we start with the current path of operations and proceed, at times iteratively, to goals and measures; however, for a new program, we would typically start with goals.

Tracing the path of operations begins with gathering information about the program through discussions with staff and by reviewing existing planning documents. This provides information about the program inputs, activities, outputs, customers, and outcomes and, in conjunction with the logic model template, lays out the program’s operations.

The formulation of strategy essentially consists of using information from the operational path of the logic model and the overall template to develop goals and measures. The goals and measures are the basis of a strategic plan as they speak directly to the issue of program intent. We described three general approaches to conceptualizing strategic goals and a somewhat detailed approach for generating goals and measures from the template and operational path. Together, the depiction of operations and strategy constitutes the complete logic model and the foundation for strategic planning.

**Using Evidence for Program Evaluation**

We assisted NCIPC in its preparation for program evaluation, specifically for its upcoming PART review, but also more generally for program-improvement purposes. PART and other evaluation processes depend on the collection and effective use of evidence to assess whether a program is “on track,” or if mid-course corrections are needed to improve program performance. Thus, our assistance to NCIPC consisted of the identification of potential sources of evidence for PART and guidance in the selection and effective use of this evidence. For the former, we reviewed PART submissions from a number of federal agencies and provided NCIPC with a list of sources of evidence categorized by PART sections. For the latter, we used the logic model to provide guidance on the selection and effective use of the evidence.

Evidence gathered for program improvement should support or inform changes necessary to improve program performance. Within a program-improvement paradigm, knowing why a program is achieving its goals (or not) is more important than just knowing whether or not it does. Particularly important to achieving program improvements is the awareness of external factors and their impact on program outcomes.

Our logic model template includes external factors and provides a framework for identifying them in relationship to each element within the operational path. Recognizing the role of external factors for each element of the logic model can be an important means of targeting efforts for program improvement.

**Conclusions and Next Steps**

Implicitly, if not explicitly, this report lays the groundwork for establishing sustainable, ongoing strategic planning and evaluation processes by introducing and illustrating a broadly applicable methodology for carrying planning and evaluation processes forward.

In conclusion, we present several specific recommendations for establishing strategic planning and evaluation processes, of which two recommendations stand out prominently:
First, NCIPC should build these processes into its organizational structure and management systems; that is, they should become an integral part of the way in which NCIPC routinely “does business.” Second, NCIPC should elicit participation from a full range of stakeholders, both internal and external, at regular intervals, to benefit from their knowledge and to engender ownership of and support for policy decisions.