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Evaluation Methods
for Rural Health Programs

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Purpose

The National Rural Health Resource Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to sustaining and improving health care in rural communities. As the nation's leading technical assistance and knowledge center in rural health, The Center focuses on five core areas:

- Performance Improvement
- Health Information Technology
- Recruitment & Retention
- Community Health Assessments
- Networking

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Today's Discussion

- Why Evaluate
- Building Your Evaluation Plan
- Steps of Program Evaluation
- Using Findings:
  - Improve Performance
  - Determine and Share Best Practices
  - Make Recommendations

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Why Evaluate?

- Critical to both the success and sustainability of the program
- Critical to assess impact of the activities to demonstrate value
- Evaluation measures demonstrate progress towards overall program goals

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Why Evaluate?

- Evaluation findings required to inform program improvements and develop lessons learned
- Evaluation findings can be utilized to:
  - Identify areas of strength
  - Determine needed program improvements
  - Replicate best practices

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What If You Don't Evaluate?

HUNCH

YOUR GUESS IS AS GOOD AS MINE

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What If You Don't Evaluate?

- What You Will Not Have:
  – Measures to inform progress toward outcomes
  – Time dedicated to review those measures and what they mean
  – Demonstration of activities producing outcomes
  – Opportunity to learn or gain insight from feedback
- What You Will Miss:
  – Important early warning signs of possible failure
  – The chance to tell your program's story and prove the program's impact

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SORH Evaluation Requirements

- Describe how the process toward meeting the grant-funded goals will be tracked, measured and evaluated
- Discuss anticipated performance measures, desired outcomes of activities and any assumptions made in the work plan
- Describe strategy to collect, analyze and track data to measure performance and impact or outcomes
- Describe how data will be used to improve performance

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Flex Evaluation Requirements

- Evaluative measures must assess both:
  – To what extent the program objectives have been met (Quantitative)
  – To what extent these can be associated to the project (Qualitative)
- Evaluation findings are required to inform program improvements and develop lessons learned
- A thorough evaluation includes both process measures (outputs) as short term outcomes and performance measures (outcomes)
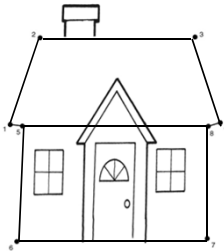
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Flex Evaluation Requirements

- Evaluation measures are required to be appropriate and quantifiable to demonstrate progress towards program goals and outcomes.
- In general, evaluation findings illustrate potential best practices, challenges, barriers, and successes, which when the evaluation findings are implemented can improve program performance.

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Building Your Evaluation: First You Need A Plan

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First You Need A Plan

- Setting up the expectations of the program and how you plan to achieve them
  - Are the results related to what was accomplished?
- Your program may change along the way
  - Identifying expected results will also help make program changes as issues arise that may cause a program to fall short of a desired goal

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First You Need A Plan

- Thorough and realistic work plan to set the building blocks for solid evaluation
- Use a framework for alignment
- Suggested frameworks:
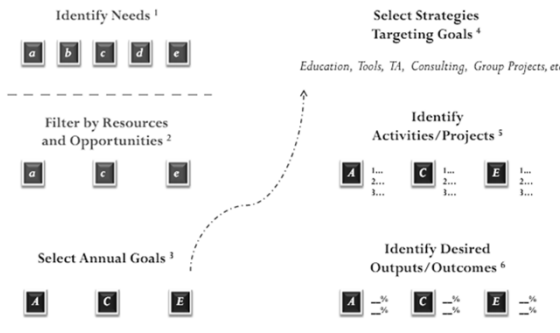 - Logic Model
  - Balanced Scorecard

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Logic Model

- Describes how a program should work
- Presents the planned activities and focuses on anticipated outcomes
- Uses diagrams or pictures that illustrate the logical relationship among key program elements using "if-then" statements

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WI ORH Office of Rural Health Flex Logic Model

Identify Needs [1]

| a | b | c | d | e |

Select Strategies Targeting Goals [4]

Education, Tools, TA, Consulting, Group Projects, etc

Filter by Resources and Opportunities [2]

| a | c | e |

Identify Activities/Projects [5]

| A | 1... 2... 3... | C | 1... 2... 3... | E | 1... 2... 3... |

Select Annual Goals [3]

| A | C | E |

Identify Desired Outputs/Outcomes [6]

| A | _% _% | C | _% _% | E | _% _% |

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Balanced Scorecard

- System of aligned objectives, measures, targets and initiatives which collectively describe the strategy of an organization and how the strategy can be achieved
- Alignment
  - Getting people, processes and resources all moving in the same direction
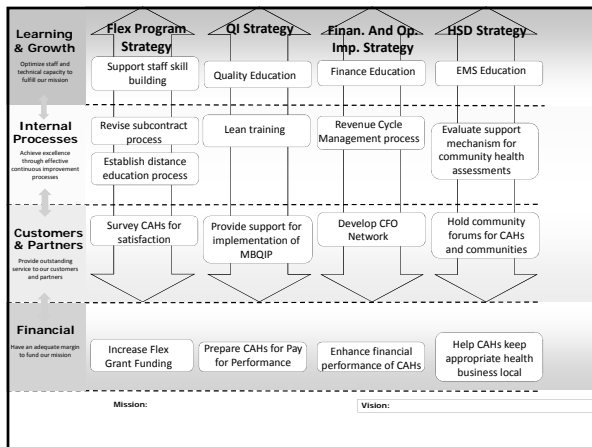- Framework for operationalizing strategy
- Way of measuring the important things and communicating at all levels

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Components of the Balanced Scorecard

	Perspective	Key Question
Cause & Effect	**Financial** — The drivers of shareholder value	To succeed financially, how should we appear to our stakeholders?
	Customer/Community — The differentiating value proposition	To achieve our vision, how should we appear to our customers?
	Internal Business Processes — How value is created and sustained	To satisfy our customers and shareholders, what business processes must we excel at?
	Learning & Growth — Role for intangible assets – people, systems, climate and culture	To achieve our vision, how will we sustain our ability to change and improve?

	Flex Program Strategy	QI Strategy	Finan. And Op. Imp. Strategy	HSD Strategy
Learning & Growth — Optimize staff and technical capacity to fulfill our mission	Support staff skill building	Quality Education	Finance Education	EMS Education
Internal Processes — Achieve excellence through effective continuous improvement processes	Revise subcontract process; Establish distance education process	Lean training	Revenue Cycle Management process	Evaluate support mechanism for community health assessments
Customers & Partners — Provide outstanding service to our customers and partners	Survey CAHs for satisfaction	Provide support for implementation of MBQIP	Develop CFO Network	Hold community forums for CAHs and communities
Financial — Have an adequate margin to fund our mission	Increase Flex Grant Funding	Prepare CAHs for Pay for Performance	Enhance financial performance of CAHs	Help CAHs keep appropriate health business local

Mission: Vision:

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Ensure Goals and Objectives Are Consistent with Needs

- Use the framework you have developed
- Take into account data from various sources
  - NOSORH resources
  - Federal Office of Rural Health Policy resources
  - Flex Monitoring Team reports
  - American Hospital Association resources
  - State hospital or rural health association resources
  - Public health data
  - Stakeholder and rural facility needs assessments and surveys

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Pieces of a Work Plan

- Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes
- Activities

Goals

Objectives

Outcomes

Evaluation should be tied distinctly to each outcome.

The outcomes should be examined at specific program intervals.

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Difference Between Outputs and Outcomes

- Outputs result from successful completion ("product") of program activities.
  - Example: the widget made by the factory
- Outcomes are changes or benefits to individuals, groups, organizations, and/or communities that result from program outputs.
  - Example: what happens as a result of the widget, not the widget itself.

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Difference Between Outputs and Outcomes

A bird flaps its wings….

An output of the bird flapping its wings would be:

- How many times does it flap her wings?

An outcome of the bird flapping its wings would be:

- How far does the bird travel as a result of it flapping its wings?

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Measure Process AND Impact

- First measurement from an activity is often a process measure or output
- To assess true impact, measures must grow in sophistication from counting what happened (output) to assessing what changed (outcome)
- How do you determine if it is an output/process measure or an outcome measure?
  - *Ask: "Is this just a count or did something change for the participants or stakeholders?"*

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Creating the Evaluation Design

- Evaluation design is a document describing the overall approach to guide an evaluation
- It includes:
  - What will be done?
  - How it will be done?
  - Who will do it?
  - When it will be done?
  - Why the evaluation is being conducted?
- Describes how program performance will be measured and includes performance indicators

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Getting Started with Evaluation Design

- What are the goals of the evaluation?
- Who are the audiences for the information from the evaluation?
  - Suggestions: SORH and Flex program staff, advisory committees, hospitals, EMS services, other state-level stakeholders, FORHP, Congressional stakeholders

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Other Important Questions

- What do you need to make informed decisions or document outcomes for your key audiences?
- From what sources should information/data be collected? How can it be collected?
- How should we measure whether or not activities are effective and producing the intended result?
- What resources are available to support the evaluation and data collection (including dollars, staff and/or external evaluators/consultants)?

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Steps of Program Evaluation

Continuously Manage the Evaluation:
Process, Time, Responsibilities, Budget, Engagement

Step 1. Engage Stakeholders

Step 2. Create and Focus the Design
- Describe the framework and work plan
- Define evaluation purpose
- Determine key questions
- Select evaluation indicators
- Determine evaluation design
- Determine timeframe

Step 3. Gather Data and Evidence
- Identify credible sources
- Select methods for gathering
- Set schedule and timeframe
- Determine sample(s)

Step 4. Analyze and Interpret Data
- Process, analyze and interpret data
- What was learned?
- What are the limitations of the data?
- What are the assumptions of the data?

Step 5. Use the Findings
- Share findings and lessons learned
- Determine best practices and next steps
- Make recommendations
- Write and share the report

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Step 1. Engage Stakeholders

- Stakeholders are those most likely to be impacted by SORH or Flex program. Examples:
  - Program operations (e.g., state hospital association, advisory committees, quality improvement organizations (QIOs), consultants)
  - Served or affected by the SORH or Flex program (e.g., small rural hospitals and CAHs, rural health clinics, ambulance services, networks)
  - Primary users of the evaluation (e.g., staff, FORHP, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) regional offices, legislators, advisory committees) 28

Step 1. Engage Stakeholders

- Why involve stakeholders?
  - Help inform the process
  - Help understand the information gathered
  - Help assist the program with necessary changes
  - Assist in results dissemination
  - Create buy-in and help avoid pitfalls that may not be apparent to program staff
  - Help move program forward and eliminate change barriers

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How to Engage?

- Utilize stakeholders' data sets
- Ask about the information they need and what additional information would be helpful
- Involve from the beginning in program planning and evaluation design
- Ask to help design assessment tools
- Place on evaluation committee to assist the evaluator in accessing data (if using external evaluator)
- Make part of an internal evaluation team 30

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Step 2. Create and Focus the Evaluation Design

- Focus on areas of greatest:
  - Concern
  - Program focus/resource allocation
  - Interest to stakeholders
- Greatest chance of assuring your evaluation is useful, feasible, ethical, and accurate if focused on a concrete plan

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Step 3. Gather Credible Data and Evidence

- Enhance credibility by using a variety of assessment methods to gather, analyze and interpret the evidence
- Use evidence to draw conclusions about what is happening in the program

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Step 3. Gather Credible Data and Evidence

- Assessment Methods:
  - Focus Group
  - Interview
  - Case Study
  - Questionnaire/Surveys/Checklist
  - Document Review
  - Observation
  - Pre-test/Post-test
  - Recommendation Adoption Process (RAP) report

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Step 4. Analyze and Interpret the Data

- Create an evaluation file (hard copy or electronic) and include documentation for every output, assessment, survey, or important occurrence in the program year
  - To help you find information more easily when it is time for an overall review
- Process, analyze and interpret data
  - What was learned? What are the limitations of the data? What are the assumptions of the data?

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Step 5. Use the Findings

- Conclusions are justified when linked to the evidence gathered and judged against agreed-upon values/standards set by stakeholders
- Must also realistically assess the role of other stakeholders/external influences that may have contributed to the change in performance

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Step 5. Use the Findings

- Merely uncovering program performance facts is not an evaluation
- Analysis and synthesis, interpretation, and judgments all must occur
- Be sure to:
  - Share findings and lessons learned
  - Determine best practices and next steps
  - Make recommendations
  - Write it up in a report!

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What if the Intended Outcome Wasn't Achieved?

- Don't be afraid of data that does not support the successful achievement of intended outcomes
  - Allows you to change and improve the program and activities
- Don't ignore it either
- Perform a root cause analysis
  - Make the identified solutions part of your next planning process

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What if the Intended Outcome Wasn't Achieved?

- Report your findings but also what you have already done or plan to do with them based on further analysis
- Remember, some things are out of your control
  - Consider this as part of your analysis
  - Do not use this as an excuse not to perform
  - How can you still influence these findings?

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Write the Report and Use It

- Summarize the background, purpose, evaluation methods (including data sources), results, conclusions and recommendations

- Your evaluation is not meant to sit on the shelf

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Improving Performance

- An evaluation is only as good as what you do with it
- An effective evaluation summary will note several areas for improvement
- If your evaluation identifies no areas for improvement it has not been thorough enough
- Disseminate results to stakeholders in manners that they can use the information
- Conduct a focused discussion with stakeholders to prioritize identified areas

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Improving Performance

- Work the improvement plans into your next program plan or evaluation
- Some improvements you may be able to tackle immediately
- Plan to evaluate your improvement plan as soon as feasible
  – You do not have to wait until the next evaluation

Check | Act
Do | Plan

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Determine and Share Best Practices

- Translating the knowledge gained through evaluation into action is key to success of the evaluation process and the continuity of best practices
- Be able to tell your tale
  – What steps did you take for an activity, what worked, what didn't, what would you do differently?

THINKING CAP

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Making Recommendations

- Recommendations for continuing, expanding, redesigning, or terminating aspects of your program are separate from judgments regarding your program's effectiveness
- Be sure to consider stakeholder values, political sensitivities, your program's resources, and other factors that may impact follow through with the recommendations

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Conclusion

- Planning is a fundamental element of program evaluation. A good plan can save you a considerable headache down the line.
- Program evaluation is a systematic, continual, and complicated process.
- Take the process
    Step by Step, Bite by Bite

ONE BITE AT A TIME

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For More Information

- Flex Program Evaluation Toolkit
- Logic Model Webinar
- Logic Model Example
- Logic Model Flow Chart
- Balanced Scorecard for Small Rural Hospitals
- Balanced Scorecard Sample (HIT Network)

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Glossary

Activities
Actions developed to achieve objectives for goal attainment.

Alignment
An organization's people, processes ,and resources all moving in the same direction.

Analysis
A systematic approach to problem solving where a complete structure is reviewed. Complex problems are simplified by separating them into more understandable components. Purposes and facts are identified, defensible assumptions are stated, and conclusions are developed.

Assessment
The process of judging impressions/thoughts, progress, achievements, or skills.

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Assessment Tool
A data collection instrument designed to collect information about impressions/thoughts, progress, achievements, or skills.

Balanced Scorecard
A planning framework that aligns organizational strategies and intended outcomes to the work that is being carried out and measures their progress in four distinct areas: financial, customers and community, internal process, and learning and growth.

Case Study
A detailed account of the development of a person, a group of people, organization or a program over a period of time.

Data
Information, often in the form of facts or figures obtained from quality improvement reports or financial information from cost reports or surveys, used as a basis for making calculations or drawing conclusions. Data can be categorized as qualitative data or quantitative data.

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Document review
A data collection method involving a review of program files. There are usually two types of program files: general program files and files on individual projects, clients, or participants.
Effectiveness
Ability to achieve stated goals or objectives, judged in terms of both output and impact, direct and indirect.
Evaluation team
The individuals, such as the evaluation consultant and staff, who participate in planning and conducting the evaluation. Team members assist in developing the evaluation design, developing data collection instruments, collecting data, analyzing data, and writing the report.
Evidence
Proof to support your claims.

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External Evaluation
An evaluation carried out by an individual or organization that has no ties to the program and is able to look at the data objectively and impartially without bias.
External Evaluator
An evaluator not affiliated with the agency prior to the program evaluation. Also known as third-party evaluator.
Feedback Loops
The section of a plan that allows for feedback and self-correction and that adjusts its operation according to differences between the actual output or outcome and the desired output or outcome.
Focus group
A group of people, usually 6-8, selected for their relevance to an evaluation that is engaged by a trained facilitator in a series of discussions designed for sharing insights, ideas, and observations on a topic of concern. A focus group is a method of collecting information for the evaluation process.

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Goal
High-level statements that outline the ultimate purpose of a program. This is the end toward which program efforts are directed. Example: Increase overall satisfaction with patient discharge from the hospital.
Impact
The ultimate effect of the program on the problem or condition that the program or activity was supposed to do something about. (Impact can be positive or negative, unexpected or even unintended.)
Internal Evaluation
Evaluation that is carried out by individuals that have a stake in the program, as well as knowledge of the program and why it utilizes the activities to achieve program goals and outcomes that it does. May express bias at times.

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Likert Scale
A type of composite measure using standardized response categories in survey questionnaires. Typically a range of questions using response categories such as strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree are utilized to construct a composite measure.

Logic Model
Describes how a program should work. Presents the planned activities for the program, and focuses on anticipated outcomes. Diagrams or pictures that illustrate the logical relationship among key program elements through a sequence of "if-then" statements that are often used when presenting logic models.

Measures
Ways to quantify the degree of success a program has had in achieving its stated objectives, goals, and program activities.

Measurement
A method of determining quantity, capacity, or dimension.

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Objective
Concrete statements describing what a program's activities must achieve in order to reach the program's ultimate goals. To make an objective concrete it should be **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-limited, or **SMART**.

Outcome Measures
A method of determining quantity, capacity, or dimension.
  – **short-term** outcomes are likely to be changes in skills, attitudes, and knowledge.
  – **intermediate-term** often include changes in behavior and decision making.
  – **long-term** outcomes may involve changes at the organization or program level

Outputs
The direct products of program activities. The tangible results from the completion of activities or initiatives that support the project objectives (e.g., project contract deliverables).

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Performance Measures
Indicators that assess the success of various aspects of the performance of a program.

Process Measures
Illustrate completion of activities. In other words, indicators of the volume of work or what the program actually did. These are also referred to as output measures. Example: conduct two medical director trainings

Program Plan
A visual, representation or model which identifies the objectives and goals of a program, as well as their relationship to program activities intended to achieve these outcomes.

Post-test
A test or measurement taken after services, or activities have ended. It is compared with the results of a pretest to show evidence of the effects or changes resulting from the services or activities being evaluated. A post-test may occur multiple times after an activity to measure retention or behavior change over time.

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Pre-test

A test or measurement taken before services or activities begin. It is compared with the results of a post-test to show evidence of the effects of the services or activities being evaluated. A pre-test can be used to obtain baseline data.

Recommendation Adoption Process (RAP) report

A specific assessment developed in the Rural Health Performance Improvement project that uses a Likert scale to assist a participant in measuring their level of behavior change or application in an organization a year after education or training.

Root cause analysis

A method of problem solving that tries to identify the and correct root causes of faults or problems. It seeks to solve a problem by identifying and addressing the root cause instead of addressing only the symptoms of a problem.

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Stakeholders

Anyone who can affect or is affected by an organization, strategy or project.

Survey

The collection of information from a common group through interviews or the application of questionnaires to a representative sample of that group.

Qualitative Data

Information that is difficult to measure, count, or express in numerical terms. Example: how safe a person feels in a hospital is qualitative data.

Quantitative Data

Information that can be expressed in numerical terms, counted, or compared on a scale. Example: The number of people that attended rural trauma team development training.

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Questionnaire

A printed form containing a set of questions for gathering information.

Work Plan

A visual, representation or model which identifies the objectives and goals of a program, as well as their relationship to program activities intended to achieve these outcomes.

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