Evaluating Peacekeeping Trainings
Designing an Effective Evaluation System for Professional Development Courses and Workshops

Prepared for The Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacebuilding at the United States Institute for Peace
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Given recent financial and organizational developments, the Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacebuilding (“the Academy) at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) requires an evaluation system that will allow it to better identify and articulate its successes. A recent threat to its operating budget and a new organizational structure is expected to raise the Academy’s public profile in the coming year, making it more accountable to communicating the progress and impact of its programs to those invested in its mission. Specifically, the Academy needs to increase the frequency, quality, and uniformity of its evaluation processes, and organize the gathered information in a way that narrates its impact more effectively.

CURRENT EVALUATION PRACTICES
The Academy’s current evaluation process is decentralized and based on independent faculty efforts to evaluate the courses they teach. Such evaluations are not conducted systematically across the department, nor do they reflect the value added to the Academy’s greater program goals and mission.

BENEFITS OF EVALUATING COURSES
By identifying how students learn, what students take away from the courses, how students apply the knowledge learned in these courses to their work, and what long-term results their courses help to effect, the Academy will be able to compare the intentions of its organizational goals with the results of its short-term training courses and workshops. Information gathered regarding the long-term impact of the course material learned will allow the Academy to better document progress towards its program goals and mission. Gathering information that conveys the benefits of its programming will be vital in maintaining relationships with stakeholders and therefore ensuring its advancement as a prominent international peacebuilding institution.

CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTING EVALUATIONS
The Academy should expect several challenges to implementing an evaluation system. Challenges to implementing a successful evaluation system are rooted in the misuse of gathered information, miscommunication with program staff, lack of follow-through, and impeding logistics. Program staff may not seriously consider evaluations if it perceives them as accountability mechanisms rather than methods for forming recommendations. Additionally, routine pressures of securing funding, reporting to donors, and implementing programs themselves, program staff or evaluators may de-prioritize the evaluation process as whole.

The Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacebuilding is the education center of the United States Institute of Peace that supports the organization’s mission to prevent, manage, and resolve international conflicts by hosting professional trainings and workshops for international civic leaders. Faculty members lead courses that bring together theory and practice in the fields of conflict analysis, negotiation, mediation, and skill building.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
To identify the most appropriate evaluation system for the Academy, we identified three research questions to guide our research:

1. What is the current evaluation culture at the Academy?
2. How are effective evaluation systems designed?
3. How are evaluation findings successfully implemented?

Robust, Relevant, and Feasible Evaluation System for the Academy
THE KIRKPATRICK MODEL: In a prior scoping project, the Academy identified the Kirkpatrick model, the most widely accepted method for evaluating short-term training programs, as its evaluation framework. Kirkpatrick’s model targets four levels of criteria for evaluation of training and education programs that help identify different dimensions of a program’s effectiveness:

- **Level 1**: Participants’ personal and immediate reactions to the course
- **Level 2**: Changes in a participant’s knowledge, skills, and mindsets
- **Level 3**: How participants apply what they learn outside the classroom
- **Level 4**: Results effected by participants’ behavioral changes (programming costs vs. benefits)

DIFFICULTY VS. USE VALUE: Evaluating student learning becomes harder to accomplish as organizations move up Kirkpatrick’s four levels. Levels 1 and 2 are more amenable to rigorous and objective evaluation design because data is collected in the instructional setting (“in-class”). Levels 3 and 4, on the other hand, attempt to identify post-programmatic successes. These dimensions are much more difficult to measure because evidence lies at “home,” outside the immediate reach of the evaluator.

As the difficulty of collecting objective information increases by Level, the perceived value of that information decreases. In a study conducted by the American Society for Training and Development, only 36 percent of survey respondents indicated that Level 1 evaluations had a high use value, while 75 percent of respondents stated that Level 4 evaluations had a high use value.

The Academy’s main challenge, then, is to determine how to evaluate student learning on Levels 3 and 4.

OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY
To inform evaluation design and implementation, we focused on a best practices analysis of evaluation systems in organizations comparable to the Academy in terms of programming and organizational structure. We supplemented this analysis with recommendations from evaluation experts and framed it with research into evaluation theory literature.

- Interviews with Academy faculty and staff to determine current evaluation processes.
- Interviews with staff members at comparable organizations in charge of designing, implementing, and overseeing the evaluation of courses.
- Interviews with professional and academic evaluation experts to supplement the findings in our evaluation practitioner interviews.
- Document review of organizations’ evaluation design documents and specific evaluation instruments.
- Review of relevant evaluation theory literature.

SELECTING BEST PRACTICES ORGANIZATIONS
To identify comparable organizations, we first narrowed down our initial list against a set of qualitative and quantitative criteria. We narrowed these resulting organizations down to a final list of three primary organizations and three secondary organizations using set of quantitative criteria:

- Naval Postgraduate School
- School for International Training Graduate Institute
- The World Bank Institute

To assess the evaluation systems of the primary and secondary organizations we selected to profile, we organized information gathered in our interviews and document review around each of the Kirkpatrick Levels. We interviewed academic and professional evaluation experts to support our findings in our interviews with comparable organizations.
RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

REVIEW OF INTERVIEWS WITH EVALUATION EXPERTS
Interviews with evaluation experts provided a general understanding of an evaluation process and supported data gathered for the best practices analysis. Most interviews have reiterated the fact that an evaluation framework is very context-dependent and must reflect client’s needs. While these interviews tended to cover overarching themes, we were able to identify certain prevailing trends.

- **Importance of stakeholder involvement:** Cooperation and collaboration with faculty and program staff is particularly important and can be institutionalized through creating an internal evaluation unit.
- **Combination of internal and external evaluators:** In addition to internal evaluators, five out of the 6 experts suggest using external evaluators to ensure legitimacy and credibility of result to the public and funders. External evaluators are important since evaluation is not an objective, but political, process.
- **Program alignment:** Program objectives must be aligned to the class activities; and then class activities must be aligned with the assessments. Given the variety of programs and the clients’ needs, a logic model is an important tool in facilitating stronger program alignment.

SUMMARY OF PRIMARY BEST PRACTICES ORGANIZATIONS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>KIRKPATRICK LEVELS COMPLETED</th>
<th>STRUCTURE OF EVALUATION SYSTEM</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal vs. External?</td>
<td>Program Alignment?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Level 2</td>
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<td>NPS</td>
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<td>SIT</td>
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<td>WBI</td>
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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL (NPS):** The Academy can gain valuable insight from NPS’s utilization-focused evaluation culture that tries to involve primary intended users in all aspects of the evaluation. Stakeholder participation and collaboration can lead to an ongoing, long-term commitment to learning evaluation logic and skills (i.e. goal specification), as well as strengthening the institution’s evaluation culture. Greater stakeholder participation in the evaluation process can also facilitate and strengthen program alignment. NPS encourages greater student and alumni participation through an online alumni community, which not only links participants together, but simultaneously collects longer-term data about their progress.

**SCHOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING GRADUATE INSTITUTE (SIT):** The main strength of SIT’s evaluation process is its systematic approach to evaluating on Level 2. Identifying exact sources of direct evidence and utilizing grading rubrics connected to greater program competencies make evaluation of student learning objective, easy to implement, and indicative of progress towards greater program goals. With an internationally minded mission and a similar organizational structure, it is advisable that the Academy model the strengths of SIT’s system. Like SIT, it would also be feasible for the Academy to create an Evaluation Coordinator position and a supporting committee composed of a variety of stakeholders (staff, faculty, higher leadership) within the department.

**THE WORLD BANK INSTITUTE (WBI):** The World Bank Institute has a particularly strong evaluation culture, which is evidenced by their ability to switch from a relatively institutionalized and highly centralized evaluation system (pre-February 2011) to a completely new, decentralized approach. The strong evaluation culture at WBI also demonstrates the importance strong relationships from internal and external stakeholders. Despite its successes as a respected evaluation system, the World Bank Institute's evaluation system may not be the best fit for the Academy. The primary limitation is the vast difference in size between the WBI and the Academy.
RECOMMENDATIONS

BUILDING A CULTURE OF EVALUATION: Implementing steps towards a successful evaluation system requires a deep organizational commitment to the evaluation process. An organization with a strong culture of evaluation is one in which decisions are made based on factual information and analysis. Building such a culture of evaluation is a long-term process that involves a number of elements, many of which are intangible and facilitated by attitudes of higher leadership and both horizontal and vertical communication within the organization. Moving towards such a culture of evaluation, however, can be facilitated through the following activities:

- We recommend that the Academy require all faculty members complete a logic model for the courses that they teach to better align course activities and learning objectives with the Academy’s broader program goals.

  **Template for Program Alignment Logic Model**

- We recommend that the Academy conduct the stakeholder analysis and then host a focus group with a representative sample of its primary stakeholders to determine their preferences for communicating with the Academy. The Academy should then determine a regular schedule for communicating the results of its evaluation system with these stakeholders based on these conversations.

- We recommend that the Academy hire an external evaluator to create and implement a system and establish an internal evaluation coordinator position. The efforts of an internal director of evaluation should be supported by period check-ins by an external evaluator. To show their commitment to building an unbiased evaluation system, the Academy should employ an external evaluator to help bring a sense of objectivity and legitimacy to the onset of the system.

- **LEVEL 1:** The Academy should require that all faculty members administer student satisfaction surveys, as several faculty members have been doing. Faculty members should also administer short reaction surveys at the end of each day of the course to make the necessary adjustments for the next day’s class.

- **LEVEL 2:** The Dean of Curriculum should oversee the reevaluation of courses’ existing assignments by repurposing written exercises and/or classroom activities to reflect the Academy’s program goals. Instructors should be required create a logic model, where every course and its assignments are mapped to every overall goal of the Academy.

- **LEVELS 3 and 4:** The Academy should administer annual alumni surveys asking participants to describe how they are applying the knowledge and skills obtained in their courses. Also, we recommend that the Academy create an online alumni community with social media capabilities to collect longer-term information on participants’ behavior and results. Introducing such online community will provide the Academy with a built-in monitoring mechanism that can track its participants’ activities and collect longer-term data. The online community would ideally include:
  - Information regarding the Academy’s most distinguished alumni and their attained positions or achievements
  - Message boards, careers network, and personal profiles.
  - A library web resources and database access to strengthen partnerships with home-organizations.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS