

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation allows project leaders to assess impacts of their programs and report these impacts back to participants, stakeholders, and funders. Evaluation shows whether the program has achieved goals, what techniques worked well, and where improvements could be done made. Both Rhode Island Sea Grant and the URI Coastal Resources Center (CRC) have years of expertise in program evaluation.

Rhode Island Sea Grant and CRC utilize an evaluative framework called Outcome Mapping. The Outcome Mapping methodology was developed by the Canadian International Development Research Centre Evaluation Unit. Information on Outcome Mapping can be found at the Centre's web site: <http://www.idrc.ca/evaluation/>.

Outcome Mapping is specifically designed for projects that focus on people and organizations, examining the subject program's relationships with others, rather than the program's products.

Outcome Mapping focuses on changes in the behavior of people, groups, and organizations that work with the program. These "boundary partner" changes are called "outcomes." With Outcome Mapping, programs can claim achievement of outcomes rather than claiming the achievement of specific impacts. Instead of measuring the impact of the program, Outcome Mapping monitors and evaluates results in terms of the program's influence on boundary partners.

Rhode Island Sea Grant and CRC have found the method extremely useful for the following reasons:

- 1) Their projects focus on influencing institutions, processes and values rather than on specific, countable outcomes. Outcome Mapping allows the projects to articulate these behavior changes and provides a strategy for monitoring them.
- 2) The cause and effect relationships of the projects are difficult to identify. Outcome Mapping, unlike many other evaluation frameworks, does not require development of a logical progression from project activities to specific environmental changes.
- 3) There are multitudes of direct and indirect forces influencing the projects' success, many of which project staff have no control over. Outcome Mapping acknowledges and deals with the complex environment within which the projects work.
- 4) Outcome Mapping provides a framework for identifying and prioritizing project strategies.

