

Recommendations in Evaluation

an Evaluation Café presentation by
Lori Wingate
The Evaluation Center
Western Michigan University

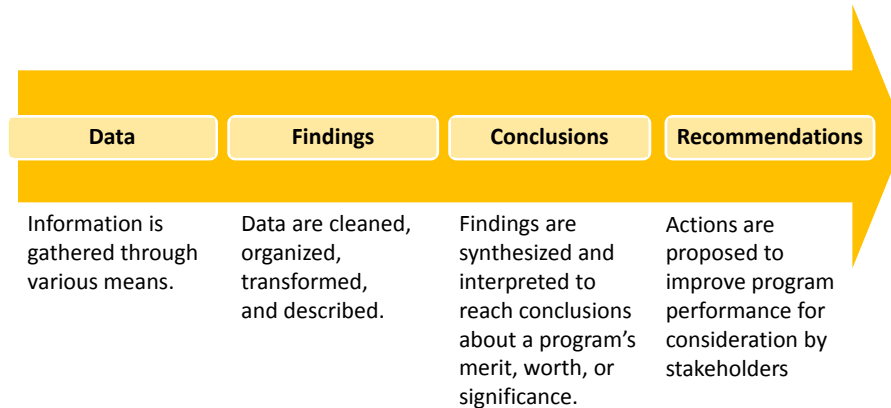


March 26, 2014

Session Objective

To catalyze reflection, dialogue,
and forward thinking about the
WHY, WHAT, and HOW of
making recommendations in
evaluation

Continuum of Evaluative Information



An evaluation without recommendations is like a fish without a bicycle.

—M. Scriven

WHY (or WHY NOT) should evaluators make recommendations?

“ The evaluator is an expert in systematically collecting, acquiring, synthesizing, and helping to value data. The evaluators are not necessarily expert in the content area of the program; many, if not most of the relevant stakeholders are. ”

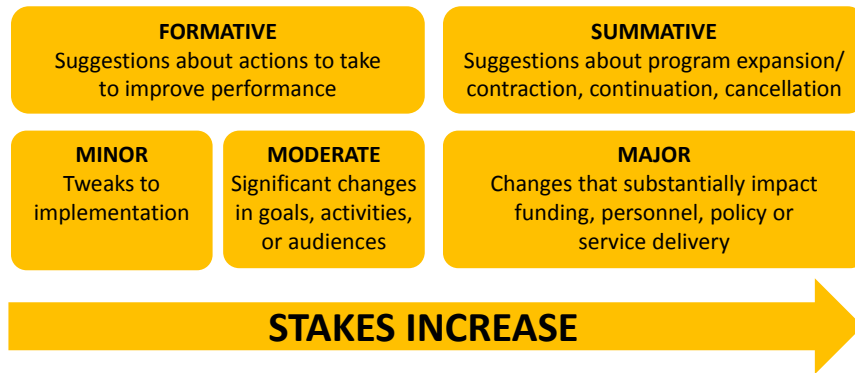
—Marvin Alkin, *Evaluation Essentials*

“ Often, evaluators think they do not know enough to make specific recommendations—that their job is to collect data and to make a judgment based on it. But, the actions that should emerge from the report’s conclusions and judgments are often not immediately obvious to readers.”

—Jody Fitzpatrick, James Sanders, & Blaine Worthen,
Program Evaluation

WHAT types of
recommendations
should evaluators make?

Types of Recommendations



An Alternative Classification of Types of Recommendations

1. Offer same program to new or wider clientele
2. Further research, more information, increased funding, or better communication
3. Address deficiencies (without specifying explicit action to be taken)
4. Change strategy or tactics
5. Change policy or program objectives

—D. Royce Sadler, *Encyclopedia of Evaluation* (2005)

HOW should evaluators make recommendations?

Tips for Evaluation Recommendations

(Heavily influenced by Hendricks, 1990; and Patton, 2008)

Development

1. At the design stage, determine the nature of recommendations needed or expected.
2. Generate possible recommendations throughout the evaluation, not just at the end.
3. Base recommendations on evaluation findings and other credible sources.
4. Engage stakeholders in developing and/or reviewing recommendations prior to their finalization.
5. Focus recommendations on actions within the control of intenders users.
6. Provide multiple options for achieving desired results.

Presentation

7. Clearly distinguish between findings and recommendations.
8. Write recommendations using clear and specific language.
9. Specify the justification/information sources for each recommendation.
10. Explain the costs, benefits, and challenges associated with implementing recommendations.
11. Exercise political and interpersonal sensitivity in the focus and wording of recommendations.
12. Categorize recommendations, such as by type, focus, timing, audience, and/or priority.

Follow-Up

13. Meet with stakeholders to review and discuss recommendations in their final form.
14. Provide tools to facilitate decision making and action planning around recommendations.

Tips for Evaluation Recommendations

(Heavily influenced by Hendricks, 1990; and Patton, 2008)

Development

1. At the design stage, determine the nature of recommendations needed or expected.
2. Generate possible recommendations throughout the evaluation, not just at the end.
- 3. Base recommendations on evaluation findings and other credible sources.**
4. Engage stakeholders in developing and/or reviewing recommendations prior to their finalization.
5. Focus recommendations on actions within the control of intended users.
6. Provide multiple options for achieving desired results.

Presentation

7. Clearly distinguish between findings and recommendations.
8. Write recommendations using clear and specific language.
9. Specify the justification/information sources for each recommendation.
10. Explain the costs, benefits, and challenges associated with implementing recommendations.
11. Exercise political and interpersonal sensitivity in the focus and wording of recommendations.
- 12. Categorize recommendations, such as by type, focus, timing, audience, and/or priority.**

Follow-Up

13. Meet with stakeholders to review and discuss recommendations in their final form.
14. Provide tools to facilitate decision making and action planning around recommendations.

3. Base recommendations on evaluation findings and conclusions and other credible sources.

Other (potentially) credible sources:

- evaluation RPF
- stakeholder
- project goals
- prior research/established criteria
- target audience needs
- logic models



Tips for Evaluation Recommendations

(Heavily influenced by Hendricks, 1990; and Patton, 2008)

Development

1. At the design stage, determine the nature of recommendations needed or expected.
2. Generate possible recommendations throughout the evaluation, not just at the end.
3. **Base recommendations on evaluation findings and other credible sources.**
4. Engage stakeholders in developing and/or reviewing recommendations prior to their finalization.
5. Focus recommendations on actions within the control of intenders users.
6. Provide multiple options for achieving desired results.

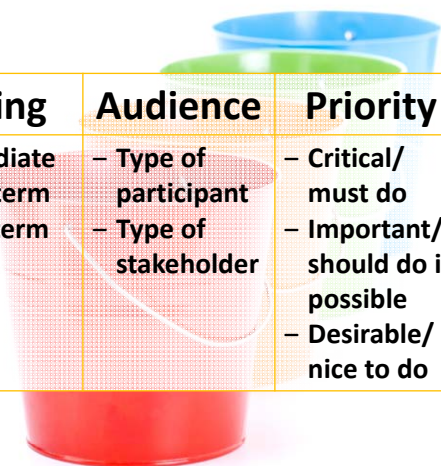
Presentation

7. Clearly distinguish between findings and recommendations.
8. Write recommendations using clear and specific language.
9. Specify the justification/information sources for each recommendation.
10. Explain the costs, benefits, and challenges associated with implementing recommendations.
11. Exercise political and interpersonal sensitivity in the focus and wording of recommendations.
12. **Categorize recommendations, such as by type, focus, timing, audience, and/or priority.**

Follow-Up

13. Meet with stakeholders to review and discuss recommendations in their final form.
14. Provide tools to facilitate decision making and action planning around recommendations.

12. Organize recommendations, such as by type, focus, timing, audience, and/or priority.



Type	Focus	Timing	Audience	Priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Quick fixes – Strategic changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation question – Program component 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Immediate – Near-term – Long-term 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Type of participant – Type of stakeholder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Critical/ must do – Important/ should do if possible – Desirable/ nice to do

1. At the design stage, determine the nature of recommendations needed or expected.

Ask key stakeholders:

- What do you hope to learn from the evaluation?
- What, if any, decisions will be influenced by the results?
- Should the evaluation include recommendations? If so, what type?



Excerpt from a Fictional RFP:

“ Administrators will use the results to determine if the program should be continued into subsequent years. If the program is to be continued, they would like recommendations about how it could be improved with minimal additional resources. ”

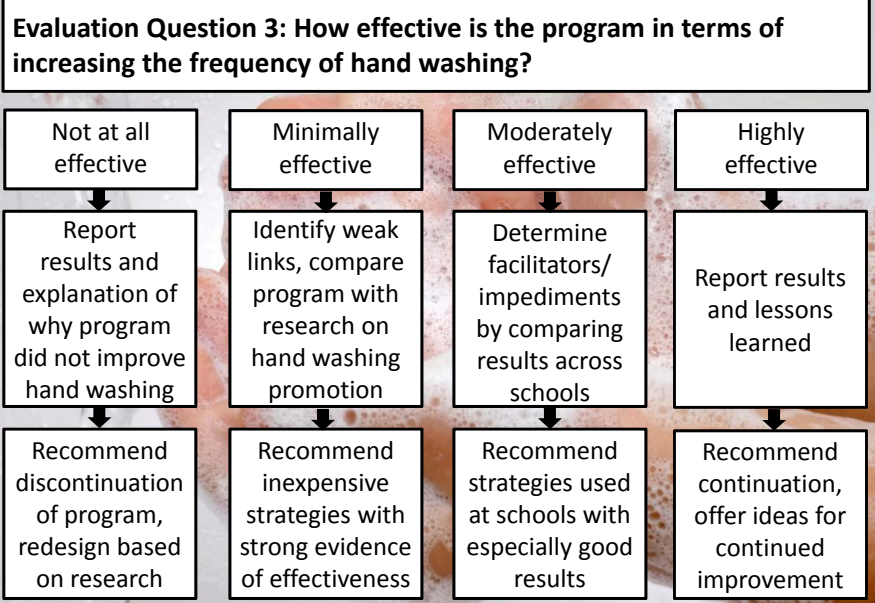
2. Generate possible recommendations throughout the evaluation, not just at the end.

- Ask stakeholders, *what will you do if the findings look like...*
- Identify potential recommendations, given the evaluation's focus and data being collected.
- Keep a running list of observations/findings that may inform recommendations.



Recommendation Generation Framework

(Inspired by Roberts-Gray, Buller, & Sparkman, 1987)



4. Engage key stakeholders in developing or reviewing recommendations prior to finalization.

Discuss potential recommendations with stakeholders to ensure their viability in terms of

- **consistency** with their understanding of the program
- **relevance** in relation to program priorities
- **practicality** in light of available resources for implementation
- **conformity** to legal/ethical requirements
- **acceptability** to those affected



5. Focus recommendations on actions within control of intenders users.

FORMATIVE

Suggestions about actions to take to improve performance

MINOR
Tweaks to implementation

Service providers
Managers

MODERATE
Significant changes in goals, activities, or audiences

Managers
Administrators

SUMMATIVE

Suggestions about program expansion/contraction, continuation, cancellation

MAJOR
Changes substantially impact funding, personnel, policy or service delivery

Administrators
Policymakers
Legislators
Donors



6. Provide multiple options for achieving desired results.

- Options may vary by cost and difficulty



Possible actions to improve hand washing program

COST	DIFFICULTY		
	Low	Medium	High
No/Low	Ensure proper placement of posters *	Assign a school-level campaign coordinator**	Create classroom or school-specific hand washing songs**
Medium		Use germ simulation lotion in hand washing lessons ***	Provide education sessions for parents*
High	Hire external organization to provide assemblies on hand hygiene and follow-up lessons ***		Develop grade-level science units on hygiene and disease transmission ***

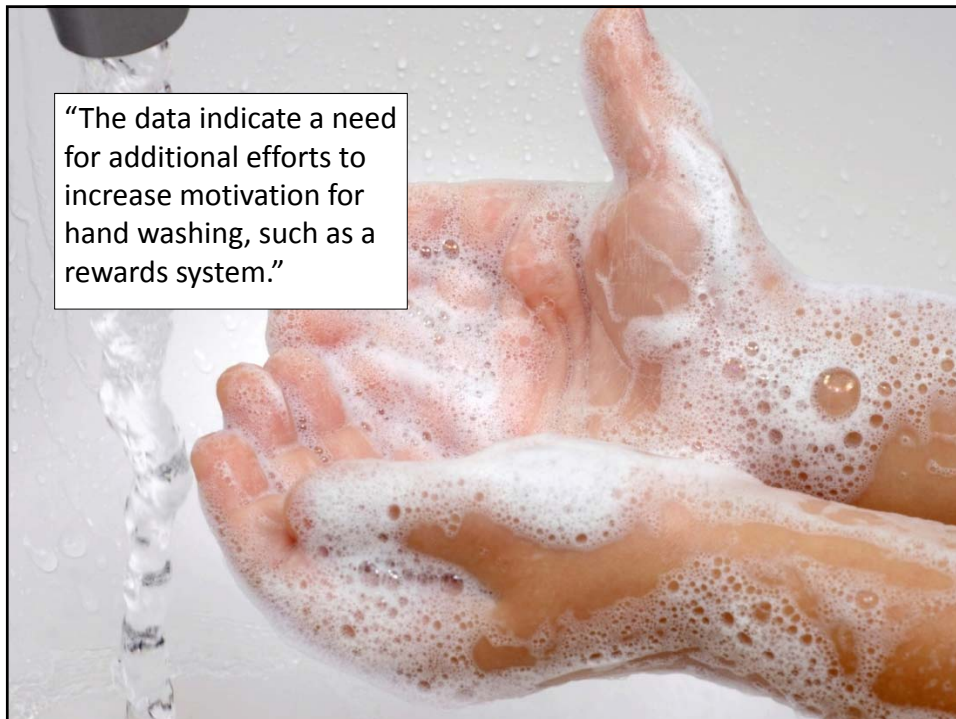
Expected Improvement: *Substantial **Moderate *Minimal**

7. Clearly distinguish between findings and recommendations.

“The presence of crackers in your cupboard suggests you should prepare goat cheese-strawberry-and-balsamic appetizers this evening.”



“The data indicate a need for additional efforts to increase motivation for hand washing, such as a rewards system.”



Data usually **do not**
speak for themselves



“The data indicate a need for additional efforts to increase motivation for hand washing, such as a rewards system.”



Finding: Students have generally achieved the learning objectives of the hand washing lessons, but this has not led to a substantial increase in the frequency of hand washing.

Recommendation: Experiment with a few different strategies to encourage behavior change, such as a rewards system, allowing more time for restroom breaks, and having schools create their own hand washing songs.

8. Write recommendations using clear and specific language.



Which actions are clear/specific?



Consider		
Increase		
Attend to		
Change		
Decide		
Assist		
Correct		
Provide		
Facilitate		
Reduce		
Acknowledge		

Be specific when a specific action is called for.

Problem

Website links to lesson plan materials are not functional.

Recommendation

Correct website links and assign a staff person to maintain the site.

Call for attention and a subsequent decision when a solution is not obvious.

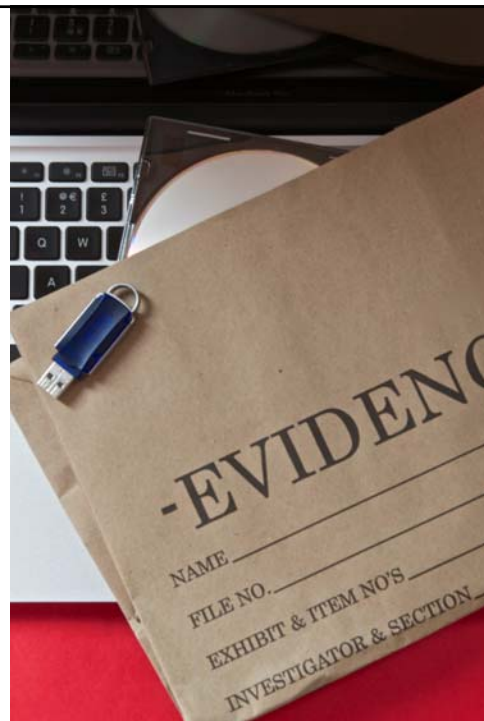
Problem

Knowledge gains among lower elementary students are smaller than those of upper elementary students.

Recommendation

Review the lessons and tests to assess their grade-level appropriateness and determine if revisions are needed.

9. Specify the justification/ information sources for each recommendation.



Recommendation: Designate a program coordinator at each school to ensure posters are properly placed and lessons are being delivered.

Justification

- Satisfactory implementation is a key factor in achieving both learning and behavior outcomes, as expressed by stakeholders and borne out by patterns in the data.
- Schools with local program coordinators had better implementation and larger increases in hand washing frequency.
- Our experience with similar programs, we have observed better outcomes when an individual is charged with program coordination.

10. Explain the potential costs, benefits, and challenges associated with implementing recommendations.



Recommendation: Add a demonstration of proper hand washing technique using germ simulation lotion and black lights to the hand washing lessons.

Costs: Simulated germ lotions costs \$.11 per student per lesson; black light (one-time purchase) costs \$10—can be shared across classrooms; no additional time needed

Expected Improvement: Three-fold increase in hand washing frequency

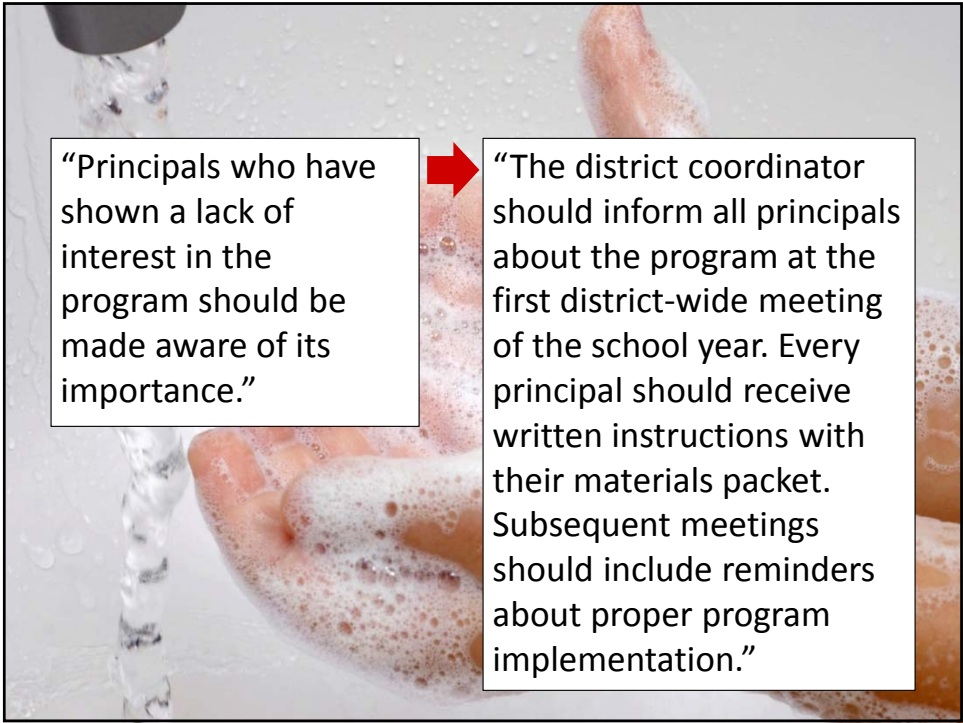
Challenges: Requires that all teachers receive guidance on how to deliver the lesson, as well as their commitment to doing so. May require some coordination to share use of black light across classrooms

Justification: Research shows this strategy to be highly effective in increasing the frequency and quality of hand washing (see Snow, White, and Kim, 2008)

11. Exercise interpersonal and political sensitivity in the focus and wording of recommendations.

- Avoid “red flag” words, e.g., *failure, lack, incompetence*
- Don’t blame, embarrass
- Be respectful of cultural/organization values





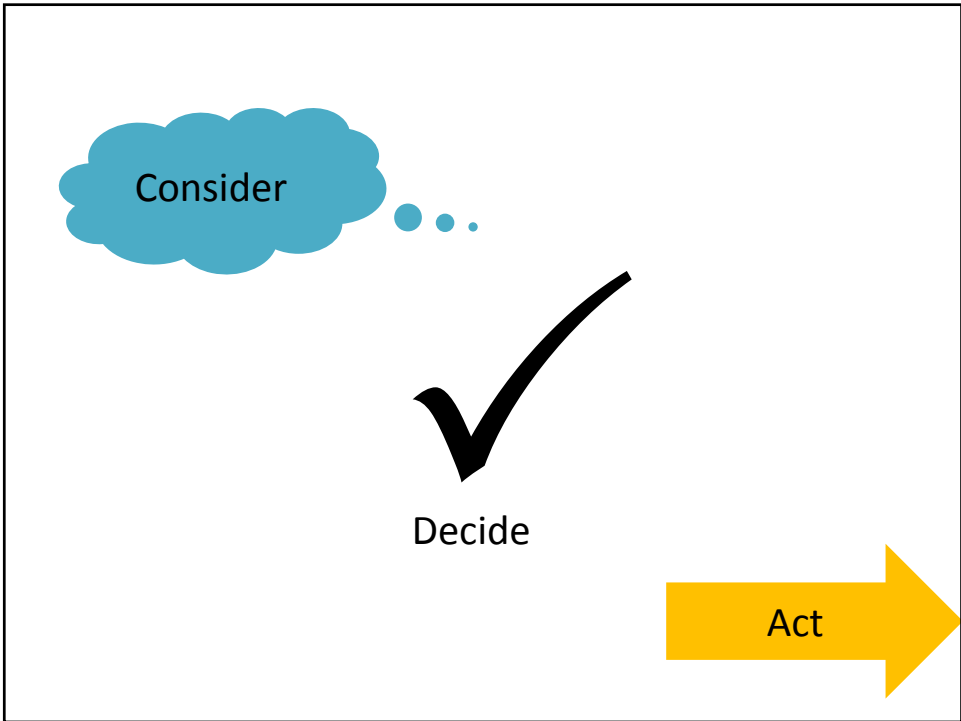
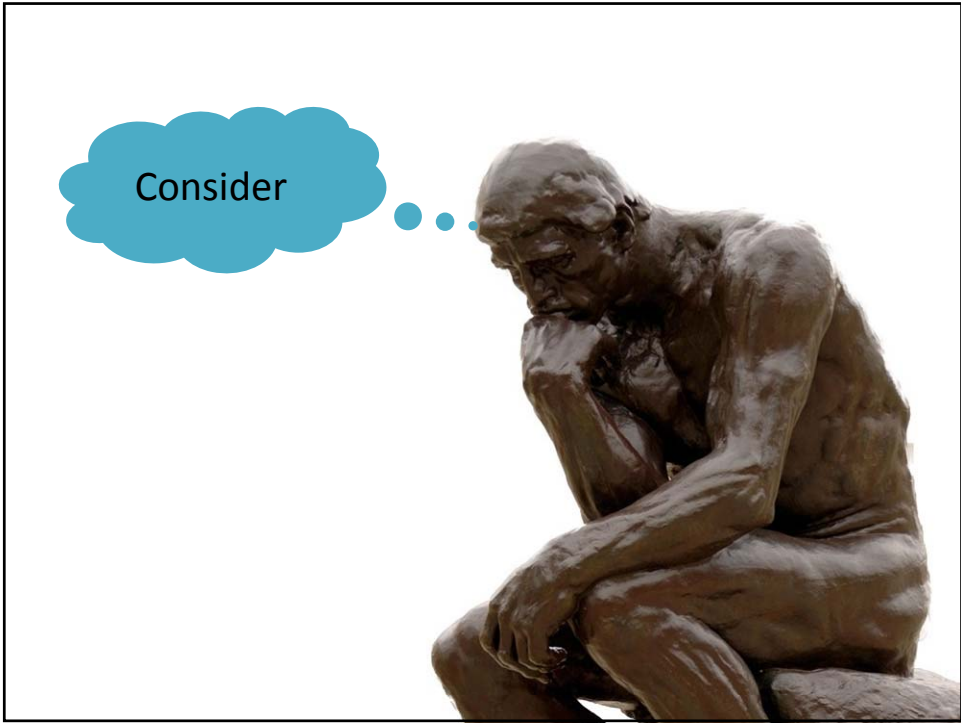
“Principals who have shown a lack of interest in the program should be made aware of its importance.”



“The district coordinator should inform all principals about the program at the first district-wide meeting of the school year. Every principal should receive written instructions with their materials packet. Subsequent meetings should include reminders about proper program implementation.”



**Getting
the
Horse to
Drink...**



13. Meet with stakeholders to review and discuss recommendations in their final form.

In-person meetings or teleconferences are critical to ensure stakeholders pay attention to recommendations



14. Provide tools to facilitate decision making and action planning around recommendations.

- Record decisions
- Assign responsibilities
- Set deadlines
- Track progress



UNDP Management Response Template

Evaluation Recommendation 1:				
Management Response:				
Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
1.1				
1.2				
1.3				

web.undp.org/evaluation/handbook/Annex6.html

UNDP Management Response Template

Evaluation Recommendation 1:				
Management Response:				
Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
1.1				
1.2				
1.3				

Evaluator's verbatim recommendation
Project's response (re: perceived practicality, appropriateness)

Concrete actions to be implemented, articulated by project
When actions will be taken
Who is responsible for implementation
Notes on progress
- Pending
- Initiated
- Completed

web.undp.org/evaluation/handbook/Annex6.html