

# ***Evaluating Your Neighborhood Watch Program***

## ***Bloomington Police Department***

**(Adapted from National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) Web Document)**

\*Key benefits to evaluation is that it offers insight into whether or not the program did or is doing what you want, if it is functioning the way you intended, and what should be changed or re-organized. The following steps help to learn ways to improve and enhance your program and efforts, however it is very important that those doing the evaluation are objective, not only in collecting information but also in asking the questions about information obtained and its meaning.

According to NCPC there are seven steps that should be used when evaluating your program:

### ***1. Be sure it gets done.***

It is often easy to delay evaluation for a number of varied excuses, such as lack of funds or being too busy with the program itself. Take the time to evaluate so you can make any necessary changes.

### ***2. If possible, build it in from the start.***

This will avoid missed measures of important changes your program has generated. It will also help to more effectively evaluate goals and objectives.

### ***3. Examine the process and the results.***

Evaluations are more helpful if they include what was done, or process measures (establishment and initiating of program) and outcome measures (crime rates before and after start of program).

### ***4. Measure consistently and accurately.***

Make sure when you gather your data, make sure you do it consistently, and measure the same kind of event each time. Be aware of external factors that may affect your numbers, such as changes in school boundaries, voting precincts, or zoning, or seasonal differences in population. Check to make sure that figures are accurate and counting systems are reliable.

### ***5. Assess changes in Feeling and Perceptions.***

According to NCPC studies show people base their actions on fear of crime than facts of crime rates. When people feel the program has brought benefits to the community, their perceptions can be a valid part assessing your program's impact. You can also look at changed perceptions unsupported or

inaccurate beliefs. An example of this would be what people fear being different than what the crime statistics say. You need to evaluate the program in order to show that you have changed perceptions and educated citizens in the area of prevention strategies for both the type of crimes they fear and those that are of concern for their area.

## ***6. Measure only those factors that are useful.***

Ask yourself at the start, “What will the information tell us about project met its goals? What would I change if the answer were yes or no? Who would want to know this information? How would this information help? The purpose of evaluation is to offer useful decisions and find helpful information about your program, such as what was successful, what was not, and what could be done to improve the program. By gathering too much information you can actually bury important findings among useless numbers.

## ***7. Use what is measured.***

Not using an evaluation that has been done is a waste of money, time and energy. Audiences for evaluation could be: people taking part in the program, volunteers, agencies and groups funding it, and media reporting on it. The evaluation can also help others trying to conduct similar programs.

The most important use of your evaluation should be to confirm that the program is meeting its goals and objectives or to point out needed changes. It can also help point out attitudes, events and results that were unexpected. These may relate to your goals or related issues or cause you to form some new goals.

## ***Putting These Keys to Work:***

In the beginning, if possible, spend a few minutes planning your evaluation. Figure out what information you will need, how you will collect it, and what data need to be gathered to start with for comparison purposes later. Also decide who will take responsibility for gathering which information.

Ideally, one person or group will take responsibility for the evaluation. This person or group should hopefully be very independent of the people running the program for objectivity purposes. This is an excellent opportunity to ask for resources from local colleges, universities, or local businesses or other organizations that have research capabilities. They may be willing to donate time and expertise to process and analyze information, especially if you provide the volunteers to gather the data.

## ***Many Ways to Measure and Assess:***

Evaluation techniques can include interviews; key observations in the community, volunteers, and staff; analysis of existing data such as census information, crime reports, economic and social data; direct observations by the evaluator; reviews of program materials and reports; and survey of key groups.