

“Mining the Model” Worksheet

It’s generally not feasible to evaluate all aspects of a program. Prioritization is essential. The visual pathway model creates a foundation for integrating program logic, internal and external stakeholder priorities, and program lifecycle considerations in order to hone in on strategically important evaluation questions. This worksheet walks you through a series of questions to identify the important considerations and annotate a printed pathway model.

Print a paper copy of your pathway model (if possible, print on 11x17 paper or larger poster paper). Use highlighters, colored pens, markers, or whatever you have at hand to mark up the model. The steps below guide you through a series of questions to identify the important considerations. When finished, step back and weigh the evaluation priorities that have emerged and assess what would be the best feasible purpose(s) for the coming evaluation cycle.

1. What does the Model show you about key program outcomes?

Use one color highlighter to circle **key outcomes** – ones that have a lot of arrows going into them or out of them, or both. For example, look for:

“Prime Destinations” (outcomes that have a lot of arrows going IN to them)

“Gateways” (outcomes with lots of arrows going FROM them)

“Hubs” (outcomes with lots of arrows going IN AND OUT)

2. What are some Key Links?

Some things are important even if there aren’t a lot of arrows going in or out. Each arrow, or link, represents some change that your program leads to or contributes to. Which ones do you think are important in the program? Mark these **key links** with a second color highlighter.

3. What are the key pathways, or main storylines in the model?

Think about what’s essential to the way your program works and succeeds – the main storylines. (If you had to strip down your model to just a few through-lines from Activities to LT outcomes, which story lines would you insist on keeping?) Mark one or two of these **key pathways** with a third color highlighter.

4. Identify key external stakeholders and their priorities:

List one to three key external stakeholders to your program (ones you are likely to report to in the coming year, or ones involved in important decisions about the program):

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Think about what each of these stakeholders cares most about in your program. Mark the **external stakeholder priorities** by writing the letter for each stakeholder next to the outcome/s or activity/ies that they are most interested in.

5. Mark important internal priorities, if any:

Mark 1 or 2 outcomes that are of particular importance to you – these are **internal stakeholder priorities**. Put a star or asterisk next to these.

6. Lifecycle consideration:

Consider what lifecycle stage your program is in, and direct your attention to the “area” of the pathway model indicated by **alignment of evaluation with the program’s stage of evolution**. With a pencil, lightly draw a line around the “area” that seems most appropriate for this evaluation cycle. *(See the Lifecycle Analysis section of the Protocol and related worksheets. At the risk of oversimplifying, if your program is in an early developmental stage the most useful evaluation would likely tend to focus on activities and program process and/or assumptions, and possibly some ST outcomes; for more established programs where those early pieces of evaluation data are already established, it would likely be more appropriate to explore further out short-term or possibly some mid-term outcomes, or some deeper evaluation of outcomes that have already been explored.)*

7. Step back and review your annotated model, make note of emerging evaluation priorities.

Look to see whether the mark-ups you have added to your model overlap and reinforce each other, or not. If they do (that is, if internal and stakeholder priorities coincide and also relate to key component(s) of the model, and align with lifecycle considerations) then this analysis points out a fairly clear direction for the program evaluation to take. The purpose of the evaluation would be fairly clear, and a key consideration becomes feasibility.

It may be, however, that the various considerations are not all pointing the same way (for example, two key external stakeholders are interested in very different outcomes, or stakeholders are pressing for more extended outcome evaluation than your program is ready for, etc.) If the emerging priorities don’t overlap, weigh the usefulness or strategic value of the alternatives that have surfaced, and make decisions about what is feasible and most useful for the current evaluation effort.

In either case, note down your suggestions for a potential “Evaluation Purpose Statement” below, and use these notes for further discussion and consideration with colleagues and stakeholders if possible.