

Resources on Evaluation

Definitions
Principles
Benefits and Challenges
Publications

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DEFINITIONS

Evaluation

“Evaluation involves assessing the strengths and weaknesses of programs, policies, personnel, products, and organizations to improve their effectiveness.”

American Evaluation Association. <http://www.eval.org/>

Program Evaluation

“Program evaluation is the use of social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs in ways that are adapted to their political and organizational environments and are designed to inform social action in ways that improve social conditions.”

Rossi PH, Lipsey MW, Freeman HW. Evaluation: A Systematic Approach. Seventh Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004.

“Program evaluation is the systematic collection, analysis, and reporting of information about a program to assist in decision-making. Many of us already assess our efforts without necessarily calling it evaluation. We assess the value and impact of our work all the time when we ask questions, consult partners, make assessments based on feedback, and then use those judgments to improve our work.”

Baker Q, Davis D, Gallerani R, Sanchez V, Viadro C. 2000. An Evaluation Framework for Community Health Programs. The Center for the Advancement of Community Based Public Health. June 2000. <http://www.cdc.gov/eval/evalcbph.pdf>

Participatory Evaluation

“Participatory evaluation is an evaluation that involves all the stakeholders in a project—those directly affected by it or by carrying it out—every phase of evaluating it, and in applying the results of that evaluation to the improvement of the work.”

Rabinowitz P. Participatory Evaluation. The Community Tool Box. Work Group for Community Health and Develop at the University of Kansas, Accessed August 2009. http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1904.htm

Research Evaluation

“The area of evaluation research in particular deals with conducting research about evaluation (as opposed to conducting evaluations). We seek to understand why evaluations happen (or do not happen) in particular ways. We develop evaluation theories (although some choose to refer to them as models) to try to explain these occurrences, and continuously test these theories in different environments.”

Baron M. 2008. The Evaluation Baron, LLC. June 2008. <http://www.evaluationbaron.com/2008/06/evaluation-vs-research-whats-the-difference.php>

PRINCIPLES OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

Evaluation: A Systematic Approach

Rossi PH, Lipsey MW, Freeman HW. Evaluation: A Systematic Approach. Seventh Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004.

- Draws on concepts and techniques of social science disciplines and is intended to be useful for improving programs and informing social action aimed at improving social problems
- Requires an accurate description of the program performance or characteristics at issue and assessment of them against relevant standards or criteria
- Involves assessment of one or more five program domains: the need for the program, the design of the program, program implementation and service delivery, program impact or outcomes, and program efficiency
- Must be tailored to the political and organizational context of the program being evaluated
- Presents many challenges to the evaluator, an appropriate balance must be found between scientific and pragmatic considerations in the evaluation design
- Evaluators are trained either in one of the social sciences or in professional schools that offer applied social research sources
- Highly specialized, technical, or complex evaluations may require specialized evaluation staffs.
- Basic knowledge of the evaluation field is relevant not only to those who will perform evaluations but also to be consumers of evaluation research.
- Every evaluation must be tailored to a specific set of circumstances so it will yield credible and useful answers to the questions
- Includes the questions the evaluation is to answer, the methods and procedures to be used in answering those questions, and the nature of the evaluator-stakeholder relationship
- Must be responsive to a program's structure and circumstances, including how new or open to change the program is
- There are three types of evaluator-stakeholder relationship: independent evaluation, participatory or collaborative evaluation, and empowerment evaluation
- Adequate diagnosis of social programs and identification of the target population for interventions are prerequisites to the design and operation of effective programs
- Evaluators can often usefully supplement other approaches to assessment with direct observations to further probe critical assumptions in the program theory
- The criteria for assessing program process performance may include stipulations of the program theory, administrative standards, applicable legal, ethical, or professional standards
- The common forms of program process evaluation include process (implementation) evaluation and program process monitoring
- Process evaluation is often carried out in conjunction with an impact evaluation to determine what services the program provides to complement findings about what impact those services have
- Evaluators assess the extent to which a program produces a particular improvement by measuring the outcome, the state of the target population or social condition
- Evaluators should also consider relevant prior research and consider possible unintended outcomes
- Have detailed information about the nature of a social program and the distinctive circumstances of those in need of program services

Evaluation Toolkit

W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Evaluation Toolkit. Accessed August 2009.

<http://www.wkkf.org/Default.aspx?tabid=90&CID=281&ItemID=2810002&NID=2820002&LanguageID=0>

- Evaluation Purposes
 - Promote learning and program improvement
 - Contribute new knowledge to a field of practice or a sector
 - Providing data that will help to shape policy

- Scope of Evaluation
 - Important to be clear about what is being evaluated
 - In-depth evaluation of different components of a program and the entire set of services
 - Understand which types of people benefit most from a program
 - Understand the effectiveness of your communications strategy
 - Understand how you have informed policy
 - Consider the stage of development of your program and what is reasonable to evaluate
 - Can and should change over time to reflect the current needs of the program

- Type of Evaluator
 - External Evaluators
 - Contracted from an outside agency or organization to conduct the evaluation
 - Found at universities, college hospitals, or consulting firms.
 - May have access to more specialized resources than internal evaluators
 - May have broader evaluation expertise than internal evaluators
 - Bring a different perspective to the evaluation
 - Internal Evaluator
 - Assign the responsibility for evaluation to a person already on staff
 - Serve as both an evaluator and a staff member with other responsibilities
 - Have access to organizational resource and more opportunities for informal feedback with project stakeholders
 - Internal Evaluator with an External Consultant
 - An internal staff person conducts the evaluation and
 - an external consultant assists with the technical aspects of the evaluation

- Identifying and Involving Stakeholders
 - All projects have multiple stakeholders with a direct or even indirect interest in program effectiveness
 - Many stakeholders will help ensure that the evaluation process goes more smoothly
 - More people are invested and willing to work hard to get the necessary information

- Evaluation Approaches
 - Being clear about the purpose of your evaluation will help you in deciding which approach or combination of approaches is best for your needs.
 - Different approaches to evaluation are based upon different theories and are practiced differently.

PRINCIPLES OF PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

Source: Crishna B. Participatory Evaluation (I) - Sharing Lessons from Fieldwork in Asia. Child, Care, Health and Development (2006 April); 33(3): 217-223.

- Everyone involved in the program shares control over the evaluation process.
- The objectives are set jointly, in a group, with all the people concerned in the program, keeping in mind that everyone has his or her own agenda.
- Working out the difficulties faced by everyone helps the strengthening the program.
- There is a process of collective awareness raising.

Lessons learned

- Importance of constant dialogue among partners
 - “Participatory” is based on equitable relationships among stakeholders, flexibility commitment from evaluators to the process, and sharing of power
- Flexibility to make changes in the evaluation plan and implementation
 - Both sides (community and academicians) contribute to the process, and a final product could be obtained without sacrificing the scientific integrity of the community
 - Most of the progress was made through face-to-face meetings and conference calls
- Important of evaluators playing the role of facilitators between the community and academicians
 - Evaluators are supposed to be “neutral” or detached” in traditional research project but in participatory research, evaluators serve as the facilitators or “brokers” between the community and investigators
 - It was crucial for the evaluators to truly listen to the partners and translate their concerns and suggestions into academic terms and “back translate” the evaluation terms to the community resulting in a product that both parties understood and were comfortable with as evidenced in the examples discussed above.

BENEFITS and CHALLENGES

Why do program evaluation?

“To provide ‘useful feedback’ to a variety of audiences including sponsors, donors, client-groups administrators, staff, and other relevant constituencies” and “To influence decision-making or policy formulation through the provision of empirically—driven feedback.”

Web Center for Social Research Methods. 2006. Introduction to Evaluation. Research Methods Knowledge Base. October 2006.

<http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/intreval.php>

“Evaluation serves as a rubber band to help an organization to create the tension between current reality and vision, as well as moving the organization towards the shared vision. This is only possible when evaluation becomes part of the culture of an organization.”

Evaluation & Learning Organization Culture. American Evaluation Association and Canadian Evaluation Society Joint Conference, Toronto, Canada 2005.

http://www.wkkf.org/DesktopModules/WKF_DmItem/ViewDoc.aspx?LanguageID=0&CID=285&ListID=28&ItemID=2813749&fld=PDFFile

Concerns and Benefits of Program Evaluation

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children & Families. Accessed August 2009.

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/other_resrch/pm_guide_eval/reports/pmguide/chapter_1_pmguide.html

Concerns	Benefits
Evaluation diverts resources away from the program therefore harms participants.	Evaluation helps to determine what does or does not work in a program. It is actually beneficial to program participants. Without an evaluation, you are providing services with little or no evidence that they actually work!
Evaluation increases the burden for program staff.	Despite this potential for increased burden, staff can benefit greatly from evaluation because it provides information that can help them improve their work with participants, learn more about program and participants needs, and validate their successes. Also, the burden can be decreased somewhat by incorporating evaluation activities into ongoing program activities.
Evaluation is too complicated.	Technical aspects of evaluation can be complex. The evaluation process itself simply systematizes what most program managers already do on an informal basis—figure out whether the program’s objectives are being met, which aspects of the program work, and which ones are not effective. Understanding this general process will help you to be a full partner in evaluation, even if you seek outside help with the technical aspects.
Evaluation may produce negative results and lead to information that will make the program look bad.	The discovery of problems should not be viewed as evidence of program failure but rather as an opportunity to learn and improve the program. Information about both problems and successes not only helps your program but also helps other programs learn and improve.

Evaluation is just another form of monitoring.	Program evaluation, however, is not the same as monitoring. Sometimes the information collected to monitor a program overlaps with information needed for an evaluation but the two processes ask very different questions.
Evaluation requires setting performance standards and this is too difficult.	Many program managers believe that an evaluation requires setting performance standards such as specifying the percentage of participants who will demonstrate changes or exhibit particular behaviors. Program staffers worry that if these performance standards are not met, their project will be judged as a failure. This concern is somewhat justified because often funders will require setting such standards. However, performance standards can only be set if there is extensive evaluation information on a particular program in a variety of setting. Without this information, performance standards are completely arbitrary and meaningless.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Participatory Evaluation

Rabinowitz P. Participatory Evaluation. The Community Tool Box. Work Group for Community Health and Develop at the University of Kansas, Accessed August 2009.

http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1904.htm

Advantages	Disadvantages
Better perspective on both the initial needs of the project's beneficiaries and on its ultimate effects	Takes more time than conventional process
Gets information that you would not be able to get	Takes the establishment of trust among all participants in the process
Tells you what worked and what didn't from the perspective of those most directly involved-beneficiaries and staff	Makes sure that everyone's involved and not just "leaders" of various groups
Tells you why something does or doesn't work	Has to rain people to understand evaluation and how participatory process works, as well as teaching them basic research skills
Results in a more effective project	Has to get a buy-in and commitment from participants
Empowers stakeholders	People's lives—illness, child care and relationship problems, getting the crops in—may cause delays to get in the way of evaluation
Provides a voice for those who are often not heard	You may have to be creative about how to get, record, and report information
Teachers skills that can be used in employment and other areas of life	Funders and policy makers may not understand or believe in participatory evaluation
Bolsters self-confidence and self-esteem in those who may have little or either	
Demonstrates to people ways in which they can take more control of their lives	
Encourages stakeholders ownership of the project	

Sparks creativity in everyone involved	
Encourages working collaboratively	
Fits into a larger participatory effort	

Evaluating Community Based Participatory Programs

Scarinci IC, Johnson RE, Hardy C, Marron J, Partridge EE. Planning and Implementation of a Participatory Evaluation Strategy: A Viable Approach in the Evaluation of Community-Based Participatory Programs Addressing Cancer Disparities. *Evaluation and Program Planning*. (2009 January); 32: 221-228.

- Community-based organizations and community members may not see the need for evaluation or may perceive “evaluation” as scrutiny and policing from funders
- May not understand the “academic” evaluation process
- Academic institutions, community-based organizations, and community-at-large may have different definitions of “desirable outcomes” and/or they may use different “tools” to measure “success”
- Disenfranchised communities may have negative perceptions (and sometimes negative experiences) completing surveys or forms for fear that the obtained data will be used against them
- Most evaluations are developed from the top down based on the biomedical model rather than participatory research or empowerment models
 - Do not capture the “spirit of change” in people
- Question the obtained results of traditional evaluations given the reluctance and mistrust of some underserved communities
- Community Based Participatory Research also involves development and implementation of a participatory evaluation process in which stakeholders and participants are part of the process

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