

Evaluation Glossary

(to accompany *Developing an Evaluation Plan*)

Accuracy: The extent to which an evaluation is truthful or valid in what it says about a program, project, or material.¹

Activities: The actual events or actions that take place as a part of the program.²

Approach: The general orientation of an evaluation in terms of the process and decision making of the evaluation itself. Approach is reflective of who has power and authority in the evaluation. Some evaluation approaches include conventional, participatory and empowerment evaluations.

Case Study

A data collection method that involves in-depth studies of specific cases or projects within a program. The method itself is made up of one or more data collection methods (such as interviews and file review).³

Comparison Group: A group of individuals whose characteristics are similar to those of a program's participants. As part of the evaluation process, the experimental group (those receiving program services) and the comparison group are assessed to determine which types of services, activities, or products provided by the program produced the expected changes.⁴ The comparison group does *not* receive the intervention or program services, however they are assumed to be similarly influenced by any possible outside influences. This allows programs to say which changes seen in participants are a result of outside influences and which are *likely to be* a direct result of the program. Comparison groups are commonly used in quasi-experimental designs.

Control Group: In experimental designs, possible participants are randomized to either receive the program or not receive the program. The people who are randomly chosen to *not receive the program* are called the control group. Control groups are assumed to be similar to those who do receive the program (because they were randomly selected from the common pool of possible participants) and to be similarly influenced by any possible outside influences. Using a control group allows programs to say that the changes seen in participants are a *direct result* of the program.

Conventional evaluation: An evaluation planned and implemented by an evaluator (often an outside evaluator) in which the evaluator is responsible for developing the evaluation plan, conducting the evaluation, analyzing the findings and presenting/disseminating the results.

Cost-benefit analysis: An analysis that combines the benefits of a program with the costs of the program. The benefits and costs are transformed into monetary terms.⁵

Cost-effectiveness analysis: An analysis that combines program costs and effects (impacts). However, the impacts do not have to be transformed into monetary benefits or costs.⁶

¹ From the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work, Evaluation Manual, Glossary. <http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/program-planner/Glossary-Eval-Res.html#qg>

² CDC. See 1 above.

³ CDC. See 1 above.

⁴ Adapted from the US Environmental Protection Agency, Program Evaluation Glossary. <http://www.epa.gov/evaluate/glossary/all-esd.htm>

⁵ CDC. See 1 above.

⁶ CDC. See 1 above.

Data collection method: The way facts about a program and its outcomes are amassed. Data collection methods often used in program evaluations include literature search, document review, observations, surveys, expert opinion, and case studies.⁷

Data source: The origin of data. Common data sources for evaluation include program records and documents, data bases, program participants and stakeholders and various evaluation instruments such as surveys. For a full list of potential data sources, visit <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/resources/pdf/Tipsheet11.pdf>

Design: The overall scientific method or logic of an evaluation, closely related to the level of rigor of an evaluation. Designs are generally described as experimental, quasi-experimental or non-experimental. The evaluation design often determines what conclusions can be drawn about program outcomes.

Document review: A technique of data collection involving the examination of existing records or documents.⁸ Can include general program files and/or files on individual participants.

Empowerment evaluation: An approach to gathering, analyzing, and using data about a program and its outcome that actively involves key stakeholders in the community in all aspects of the evaluation process, and that promotes evaluation as a strategy for empowering communities to engage in system changes.⁹

Evaluation Questions: The specific pieces of information that a program is trying to learn through evaluation. Evaluation questions can be based on existing objectives, or developed specifically for an evaluation.

Evidence: The findings or conclusions of an evaluation. The level of evidence, or rigor, of an evaluation determines what can be said about the relationship between the findings and the program in terms of causality (whether a program caused the outcomes seen).

Experimental (or randomized) design: A design in which the researcher/evaluator has control over the selection of participants in the study/program, and these participants are randomly assigned to either the experimental group or the control group.¹⁰ Control groups are assumed to be similarly influenced by any possible outside influences, thus using a control group allows programs to say that the changes seen in participants are a *direct result* of the program.

Experimental Group

A group of individuals participating in the program activities or receiving the program services being evaluated or studied. Experimental groups (also known as treatment groups) are usually compared to a control or comparison group.¹¹

Focus group: A group of people selected for their relevance to an evaluation that is engaged by a trained facilitator in a series of discussions designed for sharing insights, ideas, and observations on a topic of concern.¹²

⁷ CDC. See 1 above.

⁸ EPA. See 3 above.

⁹ EPA. See 3 above.

¹⁰ Adapted from the EPA. See 3 above.

¹¹ EPA. See 3 above.

¹² CDC. See 1 above.

Instrument (for Data Collection): A form or set of forms used to collect information for an evaluation. Forms may include interview instruments, intake forms, case logs, and attendance records. They may be developed specifically for an evaluation or modified from existing instruments.¹³

Interviews

Interviews involve face-to-face situations or telephone contacts in which the researcher orally solicits responses.¹⁴

Logic model: A systematic and visual way to present the perceived relationships among the resources you have to operate the program, the activities you plan to do, and the changes or results you hope to achieve.¹⁵

Observation: A data collection method that involves on-site visits to locations where a program is operating. It directly assesses the setting of a program, its activities, and individuals who participate in the activities.¹⁶

Open-ended Interview

An interview in which, after an initial or lead question, subsequent questions are determined by topics brought up by the person being interviewed; the concerns discussed, their sequence, and specific information obtained are not predetermined and the discussion is unconstrained, able to move in unexpected directions.¹⁷

Outcomes: The results of program operations or activities; the effects triggered by the program. (For example, increased knowledge, changed attitudes or beliefs, reduced tobacco use, or reduced TB morbidity and mortality.)¹⁸

Outcome evaluation: The systematic collection of information to assess the outcomes of a program, present conclusions about the merit or worth of a program, and make recommendations about future program direction or improvement.¹⁹

Participatory evaluation: An evaluation organized as a team project in which the evaluator and representatives of one or more stakeholder groups work collaboratively in developing the evaluation plan, conducting the evaluation, or disseminating and using the results.²⁰

Process evaluation: The systematic collection of information to document and assess how a program was implemented and operates.²¹

Qualitative data: Data that is textual rather than numerical, and often involves understanding knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, and intentions. Qualitative data includes rich text descriptions and is often from open-ended interviews, focus groups, observations or document reviews.

Quantitative Data: Information that can be expressed in numerical terms, counted, compared on a scale²², or, when a text response, text is limited and can be grouped into a finite range of responses. Quantitative data is often from surveys, document review or structured interviews.

¹³ EPA. See 3 above.

¹⁴ EPA. See 3 above.

¹⁵ CDC. See 1 above.

¹⁶ CDC. See 1 above.

¹⁷ EPA. See 3 above.

¹⁸ CDC. See 1 above.

¹⁹ CDC. See 1 above.

²⁰ EPA. See 3 above.

²¹ CDC. See 1 above.

²² EPA. See 3 above.

Quasi-experimental Design

While comparison groups are available and maximum controls are used to minimize threats to validity, random selection is typically not possible or practical.

Quasi-experimental design: A design with some, but not all, of the characteristics of an experimental design.²³ Quasi-experimental designs use group of people, similar to those who receive the program, but not randomly selected (comparison groups), who are *not* exposed to a program or treatment. The comparison group is selected to match the experimental group as closely as possible. Using comparison groups allows programs to say which changes seen in participants are a result of outside influences and which are *likely to be* a direct result of the program.

Resources: Assets available and anticipated for operations. They include people, equipment, facilities, and other things used to plan, implement, and evaluate programs.²⁴

Structured Interview

An interview in which questions to be asked, their sequence, and detailed information to be gathered are all predetermined; used where maximum consistency across interviews and interviewees is needed.²⁵

Surveys: A data collection method that involves a planned effort to collect needed data from a sample (or a complete census) of the relevant population. The relevant population consists of people or entities affected by the program (or of similar people or entities).²⁶

Type of Evaluation: The overall kind of information included in an evaluation and kind of questions being answered by the evaluation. Examples of types of evaluation include process evaluation, outcomes evaluation, impact evaluation, cost-benefit evaluation, cost-effectiveness evaluation, case studies, etc.

²³ EPA. See 3 above.

²⁴ CDC. See 1 above.

²⁵ EPA. See 3 above.

²⁶ CDC. See 1 above.