Evaluation Introduction and Background

What is program evaluation?

Program evaluation is the <u>systematic collection of information</u> about the **activities**, **characteristics**, and **outcomes** of programs to *make judgements*, *improve effectiveness*, and/or *inform decisions* about future programming. Utilization-focused evaluation is done for and with specific, intended primary users for specific, intended uses.[1]

Program evaluations range tremendously in size, scope, and methods. Evaluations encompass large-scale, long-term international comparative designs costing millions of dollars and done with large teams to small, short studies of a single component in a local agency staffed by one evaluator. Methods can include randomized experimental designs, descriptive quantitative analysis, surveys, interviews or case studies and oral histories.

What is evaluation NOT?

Evaluation is not research, which is more focused on conclusions—evaluation is focused on decisions; program evaluators may use research methods to gather information, and often also use management information system data, program monitoring statistics, narrative reports, and other data that are not research-oriented.

Evaluation is not charitable assessment: evaluation does not measure the love, sincerity, or other intent of the effort(s); it measures the processes and impact.

Evaluation is not pork barrel assessment: evaluation does not come with preordained answers.

When does it work well?

Evaluation works and is used when there is an identifiable individual or group of people who personally care about the evaluation and the findings it generates.

How can evaluation findings be used?

1. Judgement: Is the effort effective for participants? Does the effort meet community goals?
   a. For this type of use, it's important to specify criteria for determining the answers to the questions. It is also important to determine when the evaluation results need to be ready.
   b. Examples include performance and financial audits, internal performance management, and studies to determine if programs should be continued, adjusted, or replicated.
   c. These evaluation uses are often focused on external audiences—one evaluator says, "the aim is to report *on* it (the program), not *to* report to it." -Michael Scriven

2. Improvement: What are a program's strengths and weaknesses? What types of individuals or groups are successful, and which are not? What are the factors that may affect success?
   a. For this type of use, it's important to identify a limited set of questions, as there are a large variety of approaches to improvement. It's also important to develop trust between the evaluation team and staff so that formative feedback is useful.

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[1] This evaluation perspective is based on and adapted from Michael Quinn Patton's Utilization-Focused Evaluation approach.

b. Examples include internal quality management to monitor program efforts and outcomes over time to fine-tune a well-established program and formative evaluation to help during a start up or pilot phase of a program.

c. These evaluation uses are often focused on internal audiences.

3. Generate Knowledge: Can we clarify the model of the program or effort? Does the program theory work for all participants? What are lessons learned from the effort?

a. For this type of use, it's important to ensure that people who can make the most of the results are involved in the design.

b. Examples include evaluations identifying common features of promising programs, identifying common problems in implementation across sites or programs, or synthesis of case studies or multiple evaluations to identify patterns within a field.

c. These evaluation uses are often focused on broad, general audiences who may not be involved as decision-makers or internal staff.

What are potential benefits of conducting evaluation, beyond the use of findings?

Enhancing shared understanding
- Specifying intended uses to provide focus and generate shared commitment
- Managing staff meetings around explicit outcomes
- Sharing criteria for things like equity and underserved populations
- Giving voice to different perspectives

Supporting and reinforcing the program or organizational process
- Building evaluation in program operations
- Having participants monitor their own progress
- Specifying and monitoring outcomes as integral to working with participants

Increasing engagement, self-determination, and ownership
- Benefits for anyone participating in the process, including staff, funders, participants, or community members

Program and organizational development
- Model development
- Evaluability assessment provides new information for future use
- Developmental evaluation focuses on organizational practice and improvement over the long-term

Evaluation Phases in Detail

Evaluation Phase	Evaluation Tasks	Description-Story Metaphor[2]
Design	Questions	What story does the organization want to tell? In this step, the organization defines the questions that are important to answer.
	Methods	How can we tell the story? In this step, we define what data (including numbers and narrative information) to collect, from whom and when.
Implementation	Data Collection	Collecting the pieces of our story. In this step, we gather the data and voices needed in order to tell the story.
	Data Analysis	Putting the pieces of the story together. In this step, we conduct a thorough examination of the voices and data gathered.
	Data Interpretation	Making sure we got the story right. This step often happens together with putting the pieces of the story together. We make sense of the data to make sure we're interpreting results correctly and that important voices, particularly those impacted by programs and with less power or authority, are included as storytellers.
Utilization	Report and dissemination	Telling the story. When the pieces are all together, we will get to share the story with other members of the broader community, including key stakeholders like the County Council and national and regional partners.
	Use results	Learning from the story. Good evaluations, like good stories, help people see the everyday in new ways and prompt thinking about opportunities to improve.

Evaluation Example: TBD with organization

Phase 1: Evaluation Design
    Evaluation Questions:

    Planned Methods:

Phase 2: Evaluation Implementation
    Data Collection:

    Data Analysis:

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[2] Developed based on a model authored by Nicole Turcheti, Social Research Scientist for Public Health-Seattle & King County.

Data Interpretation:

Phase 3: Utilization
Report and dissemination:

Use results: