

The Community Giving Resource



Evaluation Terminology

Measuring Results, including **Evaluation Terminology**, was adapted with permission from **When and How to Use External Evaluators** (2002), by Tracey A. Rutnik, Director, Funders Evaluation Initiative, Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers, and Martha Campbell, Vice President for Programs, The James Irvine Foundation. We gratefully acknowledge and appreciate the authors' willingness to share their work with the **Community Giving Resource**.

Activities/Strategies

What a program or organization does with its resources to fulfill its mission, such as sheltering and feeding homeless families.

Attribution

Process of identifying single or multiple factors responsible for an observed result.

Benchmark/Performance Target

Desired level of result, possibly within a given time frame – for example, reduce child abuse by 25 percent by the year 2000.

Conceptual Framework/Model

Representation of elements assumed to be critical to a program's operation and expected results. The conceptual framework can be use to identify areas for evaluation.

Context/Contextual Factors

Factors outside the control of a program or project that might have an impact on its effectiveness – for example, unique characteristics of a particular community, the economy, new federal or state legislation.

Control/Comparison Group

In an evaluation involving two or more groups, the group that *does not* receive the full program or treatment; comparison group may receive some program, but not the program being evaluated.

Correlation

The occurrence, either simultaneously or sequentially, of two events or characteristics that may or may not be causally related to one another – for example, hiring a new director and an increase in employee satisfaction.

Evaluation

The systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of a program to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming. [Defined by evaluation expert Michael Quinn Patton]

Types of evaluation

Formative evaluation. Evaluation undertaken in the initial stages of program operation to inform program development and implementation. Formative evaluation addresses how the program is working and how it might be improved. Often, formative evaluation explores alternative program approaches to see which variant works best.

Summative evaluation. Evaluation of the overall worth of the program after it is in operation.

Participatory evaluation. Evaluation that seeks to actively involve all stakeholders in the evaluation process. Participatory evaluation seeks to create an egalitarian process in which all stakeholders' perspectives are considered and in which the evaluation results are useful and relevant to the stakeholders.

Empowerment evaluation. Evaluation in which evaluators (also known as coaches) work to enhance the participants' evaluation capacities and help participants apply their knowledge of the program to the evaluation. Empowerment evaluation uses evaluation tools to help participants reach decisions and identify areas needing change.

Process evaluation. Evaluation that describes implementation of a program – that is, the activities under-taken as part of a program. A process evaluation can provide information on a program's structure, procedure, and accomplishments; problems encountered in the program implementation; and how the problems were resolved or not.

Outcome evaluation. Evaluation focused on the benefits to or changes by program participants after program participation.

Impact evaluation. Evaluation of whether a program, specifically, creates particular effects or changes. Attributing impact solely to the program requires certain evaluation designs that control for other factors that might affect the outcome of interest (see "Control/Comparison Group" and "Randomized Trial Design").

Cluster evaluation. Projects are designated as a cluster because they support similar strategies, serve the same target population, or collectively address a specific outcome, such as systemic institutional or policy changes. Cluster evaluations examine such a cluster of projects to determine how well they achieve the broad goals of a programming initiative. [Kellogg Foundation]

Experimental Group

In an evaluation involving two or more groups, the group that receives the program or treatment being evaluated.

Generalizability

Extent to which evaluation findings can be applied to similar programs in other settings.

Goal

Broad, general statement of purpose. A goal can also be more specific and indicate the intended long-term result of the project or program – for example, increasing the participation of minorities in higher education.

Indicator

Measure of an outcome – for example, the proportion of the population with high blood pressure.

Inputs

Resources dedicated to or consumed by the program, such as money, staff, and facilities.

Logic Model

Pictorial representation of how a program is expected to work. Logic models show the theory underlying the program by linking assumptions/principles and/or resources with activities/processes and short- and long-term outcomes.

Milestone

A critical point that a project must reach to ensure that it is on course in achieving its stated outcomes.

Objective

Specific, measurable, time-bound operational statement of the desired accomplishments of the program that are necessary to achieve its goal. Example: Increase the number of minority students taking four years of mathematics in secondary school.

Outcome

Benefit or change resulting from an action. Often used to refer to benefits to individuals, families, communities, or larger populations during or after program participation – for example, reduction in the number of low-birthweight babies. Can also refer to change in systems, organizations, or programs – for example, improved communication or increase in number of clients served.

- **Short-term outcomes:** outcomes that can be reasonably expected within the first 1-2 years of project or program
- **Intermediate outcomes:** outcomes expected in 3-5 years
- **Long-term outcomes:** outcomes expected in more than five years

Outputs

Direct products of program activities. Usually measured in terms of volume of work accomplished, such as number of classes taught.

Qualitative Techniques

Measures that provide descriptive information about situations, events and/or behavior of individuals. Qualitative techniques focus on what the program experience means to participants in their own words, through, for example, interviews, observations, document analysis or focus groups.

Quantitative Techniques

Measures that strive for precision by focusing on things that can be counted – for example, data from questionnaires, tests, standardized observation instruments, program records.

Randomized Trial Design

Evaluation design in which potential program participants are randomly assigned to either the experimental or the control group. It is the strongest design for showing program impact. It is not, however, applicable for many programs.

Results-Based Accountability (RBA)

Management and monitoring of projects and programs focused on the desired outcomes of the programs rather than on activities and inputs.

Validity

Extent to which a data collection technique measures what it is intended to measure – especially important in identifying indicators for outcomes.

NOTE

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