

Evaluation glossary

Accountability: Responsibility for effective and efficient performance of programs. Measures of accountability focus on (1) benefits accruing from the program as valued by customers and supporters (2) how resources are invested and the results attained.

Anonymity: An attempt to keep the participants unknown to the people who use the evaluation and, if possible, to the investigators themselves.

Assumptions: The beliefs we have about the program, the participants, and the way we expect the program to operate; the principles that guide our work. Faulty assumptions may be the reason we don't achieve the expected outcomes.

Baseline: Information about the situation or condition prior to a program or intervention.

Benchmarks: Performance data used either as a baseline against which to compare future performance or as a marker of progress toward a goal.

Confidentiality: An attempt to remove any elements that might indicate the subject's identity.

Content analysis: standard social science method for analyzing text or narrative data

Context evaluation: A type of evaluation that examines how the project functions within the economic, social, and political environment of its community and project setting.

Cost-benefit analysis: Process to estimate the overall cost and benefit of a program or components within a program. Seeks to answer the question "Is this program or product worth its costs?" Or "Which of the options has the highest benefit/cost ratio?" This is only possible when all values can be converted into money terms.

Data: information – either words or numbers

Descriptive statistics: A branch of statistics in which the analyses “describe” the raw data, such as counts, percentages, measures of central tendency, and measures of variability (e.g., range, standard deviation, and variance).

Effectiveness: Degree to which the program yields desired/desirable results.

Efficiency: Comparison of outcomes to costs.

Environment (external factors): The surrounding environment in which the program exists and which influences the implementation and success of the initiative, including politics, climate, socio-economic factors, market forces, etc.

Evaluation: Systematic inquiry to inform decision making and improve programs.

Evaluation plan: a written document that clarifies involvement, purpose, process and management of the intended evaluation.

Evaluation stakeholder: Persons involved in or affected by the evaluation. Individuals and organizations with an investment, interest or influence (a stake) in the initiative and/or evaluation and evaluation findings. Often referred to as evaluation “USERS.”

External Evaluation: evaluation conducted by outsiders.

External Evaluator: a person from outside the organization that takes on the role of evaluator.

Formative evaluation: Conducted during the development and implementation of a program, this evaluation has as its primary purpose the providing of information for program improvement.

Human subjects protection: ethical principles and guidelines that protect the rights, privacy and well-being of human beings involved in research

Impact: The social, economic, and/or environmental effects or consequences of the program. Impacts tend to be long-term achievements. They may be positive, negative, or neutral; intended or unintended.

Impact evaluation: A type of evaluation that determines the net causal effects of the program beyond its immediate results. Impact evaluation often involves a comparison of what appeared after the program with what would have appeared without the program.

Impact indicator: Expression or indication of impact. Evidence that the impact has/is being achieved.

Indicator: Expression of what is/will be measured or described; evidence that signals achievement. Answers the question "How will I know it?"

Informal evaluation: nonsystematic, informal appraisal

Inputs: Resources that go into a program including staff time, materials, money, equipment, facilities, volunteer time.

Internal Evaluation: evaluation conducted by program employees and persons internal to the organization or program.

Internal Evaluator: staff from within the organization who lead the evaluation process and/or conduct evaluations.

Measure/measurement: Representation of quantity or capacity. In the past, these terms carried a quantitative implication of precision and, in the field of education, were synonymous with testing and instrumentation. Today, the term "measure" is used broadly to include quantitative and qualitative information to understand the phenomena under investigation.

Mixed methods: The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods to study phenomena. These two sets of methods can be used simultaneously or at different stages of the same study.

Monitoring: Ongoing assessment of the extent to which a program is operating consistent with its design. Often means site visits by experts for compliance-focused reviews of program operations.

Outcome evaluation: A type of evaluation to determine what results from a program and its consequences for people.

Outcome monitoring: The regular or periodic reporting of program outcomes in ways that stakeholders can use to understand and judge results. Outcome monitoring exists as part of program design and provides frequent and public feedback on performance.

Outcomes: Results or changes of the program. Outcomes answer the questions "So what?" and "What difference does the program make in people's lives?" Outcomes may be intended and unintended; positive and negative. Outcomes fall along a continuum from short-term (immediate/initial/proximal), to medium-term (intermediate), to long-term (final/distal). Often, long-term outcome is synonymous with impact.

Outcome statement: A brief explicit statement of the intended change.

Outputs: Activities, services, events, products, participation generated by a program.

Participatory evaluation: Evaluation in which the evaluator's perspective carries no more weight than that of other stakeholders, including participants, and the evaluation process and its results are relevant and useful to stakeholders for future actions. Participatory approaches attempt to be practical, useful, and empowering to multiple stakeholders and actively engage all stakeholders in the evaluation process.

Performance measure: A particular value or characteristic used to measure/examine a result or performance criteria; may be expressed in a qualitative or quantitative way.

Performance measurement: The regular measurement of results and efficiency of services or programs.

Performance targets: The expected result or level of achievement; often set as numeric levels of performance.

Process evaluation: A type of evaluation that examines what goes on while a program is in progress. It assesses what the program **is**.

Program: An organized action involving activities and resources aimed to improve existing conditions. Program may include direct service interventions, educational initiatives, community development or mobilization efforts, policy development activities, communication and social marketing campaigns, public health interventions, etc.

Program evaluation: The systematic process of asking critical questions, collecting appropriate information, analyzing, interpreting, and using the information in order to improve programs and be accountable for positive, equitable results and resources invested.

Propriety: conformity with acceptable standards of behavior

Reporting: Presentation, formal or informal, of evaluation data or other information to communicate processes, roles, and results.

Research: the application of the scientific method to generate knowledge.

Qualitative analysis: The use of systematic techniques to understand, reduce, organize, and draw conclusions from qualitative data.

Qualitative data: Data that is thick in detail and description; usually in a textbook or narrative format.

Qualitative methodology: Methods that examine phenomena in depth and detail without predetermined categories or hypotheses. Emphasis is on understanding the phenomena as they exist. Often connoted with naturalistic inquiry, inductive, social anthropological world view. Qualitative methods usually consist of three kinds of data collection: observation, open-ended interviewing, and document review.

Quantitative analysis: The use of statistical techniques to understand quantitative data and to identify relationships between and among variables.

Quantitative data: Data in a numerical format.

Quantitative methodology: Methods that seek the **facts** or **causes** of phenomena that can be expressed numerically and analyzed statistically. Interest is in generalizability. Often connoted with a positivist, deductive, natural science world view. Quantitative methods consist of standardized, structured data collection including surveys, closed-ended interviews, tests.

Random number: A number whose value is not dependent upon the value of any other number; can result from a random number generator program and/or a random numbers table.

Reliability: The consistency of a measure over repeated use. A measure is said to be reliable if repeated measurements produce the same result.

Reporting: Presentation, formal or informal, of evaluation data or other information to communicate processes, roles, and results.

Response rate: The percentage of respondents who provide information.

Statistics: mathematical science pertaining to collection, analysis and interpretation of data

Self-evaluation: Self-assessment of program processes and/or outcomes by those conducting or involved in the program.

Situation: The context and need that give rise to a program or initiative; logic models are built in response to an existing situation.

Situational analysis: A systematic process for assessing needs (discrepancy or gap between what exists and a desired state) and assets (qualities or strengths) as a foundation for program priority setting.

Stakeholder: Person or group of people with a vested interest--a stake--in a program or evaluation, including clients, customers, beneficiaries, elected officials, support groups, program staff, funders, collaborators.

Statistical significance: Provides for the probability that a result is not due to chance alone. Level of significance determines degree of certainty or confidence with which we can rule out chance. Statistical significance does not equate to value.

Statistics: Numbers or values that help to describe the characteristics of a selected group; technically, statistics describe a sample of a population.

Summative evaluation: Evaluation conducted after completion of a program (or a phase of the program) to determine program effectiveness and worth.

Systematic implies that the evaluation is a thoughtful process of asking critical questions, collecting appropriate information, and then analyzing and interpreting the information for a specific use and purpose.

Validity: The extent to which a measure actually captures the concept of interest.