



Measuring The Difference: An Outcome Evaluation Resource for the Disability Sector

MODULE 2

Other Evaluation Approaches

Prepared for
Alberta Council of Disability Services

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Other Evaluation Approaches

The focus of outcome evaluation is to examine a program from the perspective of whether and to what extent it is benefiting its clients and achieving its intended outcomes. It is *one* type of evaluation that an organization can undertake.

An organization that has a **quality improvement** focus and culture will use different types of evaluations in different parts of its organization at different times depending on:

- the purpose of the evaluation (what decisions will the evaluation help to make?)
- the audience and stakeholders of the evaluation (program managers, funders, clients, staff, community, etc.)
- the types of questions that the evaluation is required to answer
- the nature of the relationship between the evaluator and those requesting the evaluation (internal evaluator, external consultant, what role the stakeholders will play, etc.)
- other factors or circumstances that may direct the most suitable evaluation approach.

This Module summarizes some of the most common evaluation approaches that a disability service is likely to encounter.

2.1 GOAL-BASED AND PROCESS-BASED EVALUATIONS

In addition to outcome evaluations, two other evaluation approaches that are common in organizations are **goal-based** and **process-based** evaluations.

Goal-based evaluation

The objective of a goal-based evaluation is to assess the extent to which a program, or the organization as a whole, is meeting its stated goals and objectives.

- Goal-based evaluation differs from outcome evaluation in that a program, or organization, may have goals in addition to those related to client benefits, e.g., one goal may be to achieve financial stability and sustainability so the organization can deliver its services more effectively, another may be to provide its services in an environmentally responsible manner. These goals may have no direct benefit for the organization's clients, but are still important to evaluate.

Process-based evaluation

The objective of a process-based evaluation is to assess the various processes involved in carrying out the program. These processes may include: program promotion and marketing processes; client intake and assessment processes; service planning and monitoring processes; staff recruitment, assignment, performance review and training processes; processes related to administrative functions and oversight; client discharge and follow-up processes; and any other program-specific activities that are involved in the program implementation.

- o Process-based evaluation differs from outcome evaluation in that the focus of the evaluation is to examine *how the program is running*, not whether it is benefiting the client (the latter is assumed until demonstrated via an outcome evaluation).

2.2 EVALUATIONS TARGETED FOR SPECIFIC STAGES IN THE LIFE OF A PROGRAM

Evaluations are useful practices at every stage in the life of a program. Exhibit 2.1 summarizes the major questions that may be important to answer at each stage of a program's development, and the corresponding evaluation approaches that are designed to address them.

EXHIBIT 2.1: PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT STAGE AND RELATED EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND APPROACHES		
Program Stage	Major Question	Evaluation Approach
1. Assessment of social problems and needs	To what extent are community needs and standards met?	Needs assessment; problem description
2. Determination of goals	What must be done to meet those needs and standards?	Needs assessment; description of service needs
3. Design of program alternatives	What services could be used to produce the desired changes?	Assessment of program logic or theory
4. Selection of alternatives	Which of the possible program approaches is best?	Feasibility study; formative evaluation
5. Program implementation	How should the program be put into operation?	Implementation assessment
6. Program operation	Is the program operating as planned?	Process evaluation; program monitoring
7. Program outcomes	Is the program having the desired effects?	Outcome evaluation
8. Program efficiency	Are program effects being attained at a reasonable cost?	Cost-benefit analysis; cost-effectiveness analysis

SOURCE: Adapted from Pancer & Westhues, 1989, as cited by Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004: 40.

Formative vs. Summative Evaluations

Two types of evaluations that most readers have likely heard before are **formative evaluations** and **summative evaluations**.

Formative evaluations are undertaken during the life of the program to help make improvements to the program. They may occur periodically and at a number of key junctures in the life of the program (e.g., at end of pilot-test, after the first round of clients have been enrolled and the second round of intake has not yet started, at the end of each year or two years, etc). The audience of formative evaluations are typically program administrators and operators. Most of the types of evaluations that we are concerned with are formative in their intent.

Summative evaluations are undertaken to render a judgement about some specific aspect of a program's performance, but when it is no longer possible to change the program (e.g., if some component that the program was offering had ended, or, typically, when the program as a whole comes to an end). The findings from a summative evaluation may not be useful any longer to that program as such, but may provide useful learnings to program designers and planners for future similar program models.

"When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative; when the guests taste the soup, that's summative."

Robert Stakes, as cited at:

http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/edtech/etc667/proposal/evaluation/summative_vs._formative.htm

2.3 EVALUATION APPROACHES UNDERSTOOD IN TERMS OF EVALUATOR-STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS

The type of relationship that the evaluator is expected (or desires) to have with the stakeholders of the evaluation influences the evaluation approach and design. These, in turn, influence who uses the evaluation findings and for what purpose. The main approaches that can be understood in terms of evaluator-stakeholder relationships are: **independent evaluation**, **participatory or collaborative evaluation**, **utilization-focused** and **empowerment evaluation**.

Independent evaluation

Independent evaluation is typically characterized by having an external evaluator contracted to conduct the evaluation. Those who are paying for the evaluation (e.g., the program's funder or the organization's board or executive team) stipulate the purpose and parameters for the evaluation, and leave it up to the evaluator to design, conduct and report the findings of the evaluation. Although the evaluator may consult with various stakeholders to help shape the evaluation, the decision-making lies in the hands of the evaluator or the sponsors.

Participatory or collaborative evaluations

Participatory or collaborative evaluations are characterized by the evaluator and various stakeholders working together as a team to design, conduct and interpret the findings of the evaluation. The evaluator's role is typically to provide technical expertise on how to gather and interpret the data so that the information is valid and reliable. Most other aspects of the evaluation process (what the purpose and scope of the evaluation is, what questions to ask, where and how to gather the information, what the findings mean and who to share them to, etc.), are decided collaboratively by the team. The evaluator may be an external person contracted for the job, as for an independent evaluation, but the role and scope are completely different than for an independent evaluation.

Utilization-focused evaluation

Utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 2008) is a specific form of participatory and collaborative evaluation that states clearly up-front that its objective is to work with the intended users of the information to ensure that the evaluation findings are responsive to their stated needs and that the information is something that they can and will use. In this approach, careful consideration is given at all stages of the evaluation process to how the evaluation decisions and activities will impact its usability.

Empowerment evaluation

Empowerment evaluation, like participatory or collaborative evaluation, involves the evaluator working in close collaboration with the stakeholders, but with the added objective to build the capacity of the stakeholders to conduct their own evaluation, and to use the results for advocacy and change. Empowerment evaluation is the ideal approach to use when the intention is to increase the self-advocacy skills and political influence of program participants.

REFERENCES

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