



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

MODULE 9

Glossary

Prepared for
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Activities: What the program does with the inputs it has in order to achieve the programs stated goals. They include strategies, techniques, interventions, treatment plans, etc. It is the “delivery” aspect of service delivery.

Clients: Participants receiving services. Depending on the nature of the service, clients may be referred to as consumers, customers, patients, etc.

Constraints: Forces outside of the program that may influence any part of its inputs, activities, outputs or outcomes by making it more difficult for the program to achieve its outcomes. Programs should try to mitigate the influence of constraints.

Continuous quality improvement (CQI): A management approach and a process to create an environment that seeks to continuously improve the quality of an organization’s programs and services in order to maximise benefits for clients.

Empowerment evaluation: A form of participatory or collaborative evaluation, where there is 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, for example, of program participants.

Enablers: Forces outside of the program that may positively influence any part of its inputs, activities, outputs or outcomes. Programs should try to enhance the influence of enablers.

Evaluation: A process of systematic inquiry directed at collecting, analyzing and interpreting information so that one can draw conclusions about the merit, worth, value or significance about a program, project, policy or whatever it is that is being examined.

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.

Independent evaluation: This typically involves an external evaluator contracted to conduct the evaluation. The evaluation sponsors stipulate the purpose and parameters for the evaluation, and leave it 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.

Indicator: A measureable characteristic that is a reasonable representation of the item being measured, and which can be specified in terms of the specific statistic(s) that will be calculated (e.g., number or percentage, or ratio, etc.).

Inputs: The human, financial and material resources made available to or used by the program to achieve its goals.

Organizational culture: The collection of shared values and norms in an organization that control the way people interact with each other and with external stakeholders. It influences people's beliefs and ideas about appropriate goals, practices, standards of behaviour and expectations.

Outcome evaluation: A systematic examination of the outcomes (changes or benefits) resulting from a set of activities implemented to achieve a stated goal, and a systematic examination of the extent to which those activities actually caused those outcomes to occur. The intent of outcome evaluation is to assess effectiveness with respect to the benefits achieved, suggest improvements and possibly provide direction for future activities.

Outcome measurement: "Involves the identification of outcomes; development of appropriate outcome indicators and data collection procedures; data analysis to better understand organization achievements; and user-friendly, regular reporting of the findings."

Source: Morley, Vinson & Hatry, (2001: 5).

Outcome measurement framework: A table summarizing the outcomes that will be measured, their respective indicators, data sources and data collection methods.

Outcomes: Changes in individuals, organizations, communities or governments that occur as a result of specific, targeted activities. In human services, outcomes generally refer to changes in client knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours, condition or status, resulting from the client's involvement in a program or service. The changes may be positive or negative, intentional or unintentional. They may occur during or after the client's participation in the program and may be short-term, intermediate-term or long-term.

Outputs: The direct products of program activities, e.g., number of counselling sessions facilitated, number of clients served, number of hours of support provided, etc. In and of themselves, outputs have little value; they are important in that they are intended to lead to positive outcomes for the program participants. Despite having little inherent value, most program measurement systems track and report program output data.

Participatory or collaborative evaluation: In this form of evaluation, the evaluator and various stakeholders work closely 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 are decided collaboratively by the team.

Process-based evaluation: An assessment focusing on the various processes involved in carrying out the program in order to understand how the program is working.

Program: A set of coordinated and related activities implemented to provide a defined set of services to produce a defined set of outcomes for a specified client group.

Program evaluation: "The systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics and results of programs to make judgments about the program, improve or further develop program effectiveness, inform decisions about future programming, and/or increase understanding".

Source: Patton (2008:39).

Program logic model: A flowchart that summarizes and shows the link between program inputs, activities, outputs and the resulting hierarchy of the intended immediate, intermediate and

long-term outcomes for program participants. Some logic models may also show external influencing factors (enablers and constraints) that are likely to affect program outcomes.

Program outcome model: See Program logic model.

Program theory: A set of assumptions about how program inputs and activities are related to each other (sometimes called *program process theory*) and to the program's intended outcomes (*program impact theory*).

Quality improvement: An approach based on a simple, cyclical concept of: "Plan - Do - Check - Act". The "Check" part of the cycle forces reflecting on and evaluating the activities completed and is followed by action aiming for further improvement. The approach is based on the belief that there is always room for improvement.

Results based management (RMB): "A life-cycle approach to management that integrates strategy, people, resources, processes and measurements to improve decision-making, transparency, and accountability. The approach focuses on achieving outcomes, implementing performance measurement, learning and changing, and reporting performance."

Source: Government of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat (2005:1).

Stakeholders: Individuals, groups or organizations who have a vested interest in a program or service. These typically include: (i) those who benefit from the program (clients, families and their communities); (ii) those who administer and are responsible for the program (program developers, direct staff, administrators); (iii) those who have decision-making power over the program (funders, policy-makers, boards).

Strategic framework: An organization's strategic framework consists of its vision, mission, values, strategic goals and a brief overview of its program areas. Some strategic frameworks may also explicitly state the organization's theory of change, although it is more likely to find the theory expressed implicitly by the organization's goals and programs. The strategic framework serves as a direction setting-tool and also as a plan of action to position the organization to serve its mission effectively.

Summative evaluation: An evaluations 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, for example, when a specific aspect or the program as a whole have ended.

Theory of change: An explanation of how the organization believes social change can be brought about. The theory identifies the essential building blocks needed to bring about social change, a map called a pathway of change or change framework, that shows how these building blocks interconnect, the interventions necessary to bring about change, underlying assumptions and the concurrent work of others to achieve the same goals.

Utilization-focused evaluation: "Evaluation done for and with specific intended primary users for specific, intended uses. Utilization-focused evaluation begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use; therefore, evaluators should facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluation with careful consideration for how everything that is done, from beginning to end, will affect use."

Source: Patton (2008:37).