

## Evaluation

<b>What is evaluation?</b>	Evaluation is systematic inquiry designed to measure the merit or worth of a program (e.g., Project Headstart), a process (e.g., phonics), a policy (e.g., retention), or a product (e.g., <i>Open Court Reading</i> ).
<b>How is evaluation different from research?</b>	Evaluation is inquiry that is applied to specific situations and designed to inform decision-making. Research, on the other hand, is inquiry designed to build general knowledge about education, usually independent of specific programs.
<b>How is evaluation different from assessment?</b>	Evaluation generally refers to the measurement or description of <i>programs</i> , while assessment refers to the measurement or description of <i>student achievement</i> .
<b>How do I know when I need to conduct an evaluation?</b>	<p>You should conduct an evaluation if any of the following is true:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Evaluation is required by a funder or by authorizing legislation.</li><li>▶ Your program needs to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders.</li><li>▶ Potential funders need evidence that demonstrates your program's value.</li><li>▶ Your program includes innovative components that have yet to be fully tested or proven.</li><li>▶ Your program will exist for more than a brief period of time or include multiple cycles of planning and implementation.</li></ul>
<b>How much evaluation can our staff do without hiring a consultant?</b>	<p>This will depend on several factors, including availability of staff and the extent to which they possess necessary experience and expertise. The other factor is the degree of importance of having an outside perspective, which increases as a project encompasses more funding or requires greater accountability to stakeholders.</p> <p>It is the OAC's firm belief that districts, schools, and organizations should be empowered to conceptualize and drive their own evaluations. This conviction is both philosophical and practical, in that it can ensure more effective use of the evaluation process.</p> <p>Notwithstanding, the assistance of an outside evaluation consultant provides significant advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ An independent, critical perspective.</li><li>▶ The ability to synthesize across programs and to see the bigger picture, sometimes difficult for program participants.</li><li>▶ Assistance in technical areas such as design, questions, sampling, and data analysis.</li></ul>

**How do I begin to conduct an evaluation?**

Two initial steps are critical: (1) Focus the evaluation by presenting the most important information that you and others need in the form of key questions. (2) Bring others into planning so there is wide ownership of the evaluation process.

**How do I select a consultant?**

Look for someone with experience in planning and conducting evaluations of similar programs. The nearest university (especially the college of education) might be a good source. Also, you might check the Evaluation Center's Website (<http://ec.wmich.edu/evaldir/>) for evaluators in your area.

**How much should I budget for evaluation?**

A good rule of thumb is that an effective evaluation requires from 5% to 10% of the overall program budget. Although the latter figure may seem high, it can easily be afforded if you embed evaluation into your program. See the Fact Sheet *Embedding Evaluation*.

**How often should I evaluate?**

Traditionally, evaluations are either *formative* (conducted at interim stages of implementation) or *summative* (conducted at the end of a program). Ideally, an evaluation begins with initial planning and continues throughout the program's lifetime.

**Can evaluation help with funding?**

Yes. Evaluation can provide evidence that your program is meeting its goals and that your organization or district is using evidence to build in cycles of continuous improvement.

**What if my evaluation yields negative findings?**

This is the great advantage of continuous evaluation: if you constantly collect and analyze data, negative findings can help you make early corrections that will improve program outcomes later. In fact, building in continuous evaluation *and* being open to negative findings are both essential to continuous learning and improvement.