

Program Evaluation

What is program evaluation?

Program evaluation is a systematic process of gathering objective evidence about a program and using that evidence to make judgments about the merit or worth of the program.

When should program evaluation occur?

Program evaluation should be ongoing. It begins during planning and continues throughout the life of the program and beyond.

What is the difference between formative and summative evaluation?

Formative evaluation occurs during program planning and implementation. **Summative** evaluation occurs after the program or one of its major phases has been completed.

How is evaluation information used?

Evaluation information provides evidence that can be used to:

- Make ongoing improvements to the program. Formative evaluation helps in determining whether progress toward program outcomes is adequate and whether changes need to be made in how the program activities are conducted or supported.
- Make major decisions. Summative evaluation provides information about the program outcomes and impacts that helps in deciding whether the program should be revised, expanded, discontinued, or replicated. Funders often use summative program evaluations in deciding whether to continue supporting a program.

What is the evaluation process?

The process of planning and implementing a formal evaluation can be described in ten steps.

- 1) Describe your program context, desired outcomes, and activities.
- 2) Develop evaluation questions.
- 3) Identify acceptable evidence.
- 4) Choose evaluation methods.
- 5) Design and plan the evaluation.
- 6) Collect the evidence, employing the methods you chose in step 4.
- 7) Analyze and interpret the evidence.
- 8) Integrate and synthesize what you have learned to draw conclusions.
- 9) Report your findings.
- 10) Apply your findings.

What are the major questions that are typically addressed in an evaluation?

According to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, a comprehensive evaluation focuses on:

- Context--how does the program function within its environment?
- Implementation--what happens as the program activities are carried out?
- Outcomes--what results has the program achieved, particularly what positive changes have occurred in the lives of those served by the program?

What is a logic model?

A logic model is a tool often used in program planning and evaluation. It combines words and graphical devices to visually represent a program. It shows clear connections between resources or inputs, activities, desired outcomes, and public value. In its program evaluation guide, the Kellogg Foundation refers to a logic model as "a picture of how your program works."

What makes program evaluation findings credible?

- The evidence that is collected supports the claims being made.
- Evidence should be a combination of **quantitative** data (the results of numerical measurement and statistical analysis) and **qualitative** data (the results of investigating perceptions, opinions, and behaviors).
- The **evaluator** (the individual or group conducting the evaluation) has the necessary expertise and will not be significantly affected by the outcome of the evaluation.

What are some common methods for collecting evaluation evidence?

Evaluation evidence often comes from examining documents (such as student work), examining numbers and statistics, administering opinion surveys, conducting interviews and focus groups, engaging in direct observation of the program, and analyzing case studies.

Each method has advantages and disadvantages. Methods should be selected based on their ability to answer evaluation questions, as well as the resources and time that are available.

Resources

Stevens, L.K. (1993). *Through a mirror: A guide to evaluating programs*. National Endowment for the Arts.

W. K. Kellogg Foundation. (1998). *Evaluation handbook*. Battle Creek, MI: W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

W. K. Kellogg Foundation. (2001). *Logic model development guide*. Battle Creek, MI: W.K. Kellogg Foundation.