

Major Types of Evaluations

Needs Assessment

Used to determine the exact nature of a social problem

Quantitative and Qualitative data collection methods are used to gather information about the Density, Size, Distribution, Underlying Causes, and History of a social problem. Focus groups, formal and informal surveys, review of literature, participant observations, and face-to-face interviews are some of the methods commonly utilized. The needs assessment findings are the basis for a logic model.

Monitoring

Used to “count” the inputs and outputs of a program

Simple – and sometimes – complex Management Information Systems (MIS) are put in place to determine what is happening once a social program begins. It could be as simple as a monthly report from program staff indicating how many individuals used the services provided.

Formative Evaluation

Gathering of data to inform the refinement of a pilot program/project/organization

An evaluation design is selected and implemented that permits the funders, program staff, Board, program participants and other stakeholders to learn about the program – pros and cons- in an effort to correct program problems before they do serious harm.

Process or Implementation Evaluation

Used to determine if a program/project has been delivered and received as designed

A process evaluation provides information on a program’s integrity and its fiscal accountability. Key questions: Has the program been implemented as designed? Have the program funds been used as intended. Qualitative data collection strategies are particularly useful in assessing program integrity. But both qualitative and quantitative data is often collected in a process evaluation.

Outcome Evaluation (correlation)

Answers the question – What are the program/project outcomes – as distinct from input and outputs - Tracking the results of the program –straightforward description data collection and analysis. Internal data is collected to capture the results of the program inputs and outputs. No attempt is made to determine the impact of external factors or to compare to similar programs. Correlation can be determined but NOT causation. It is just the facts!

Impact Evaluation (causation)

Quasi-experimental and experimental research designs are used – and qualitative and quantitative data is collected – to determine if the program has any positive and/or negative results on the target audience. The value of using this sophisticated research design (i.e. includes randomly assigned treatment recipients or the selection of comparison groups comparable to program participants) is that it permits evaluators to use statistics (math) to rule out other

possible explanations for the outcomes – i.e. can eliminate competing explanations. It determines causation.

Summative Evaluation

Studies that analyze all the data collected in previous types of evaluations conducted and summarize what was learned about the program. A good example is “mega-evaluations” that include careful analyses of all pre-existing evaluations with the goal of determining what the scientific literature tells us about the outcomes and impacts of programs.