

# Challenges to program evaluation?

A beginners guide

## What is evaluation

This is the first in a set of handouts on the challenges to program evaluation. This is about one of the major challenges in program evaluation:

### *Getting answers*

Programs often have questions about the outcomes of the program, for example:

- Does the program have an effect? That is, does the program cause a specific outcome?

However, evaluations sometimes cannot answer these questions. An evaluation may not be able to determine whether a program had an effect, whether it was the program that causes the outcome.

A number of ways may be used to determine whether a program causes an outcome, including comparison groups, multiple methods or intensive case studies.

If none of these methods, or no similar methods, can be used, then it may be difficult, if not impossible, to clearly determine whether the program had an effect.

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If the evaluation cannot say whether the program caused an outcome, then there are other questions. For example:

- What happened to people in the program.

The evaluation just describes what happened to people in the program, without drawing any conclusions about whether the program caused the outcome.

For example, an evaluation might say “Most people in the job training program got jobs.”

Other questions about the program might be, for example,

- How well is the program working?
- Is the program reaching everyone?

For these questions, the focus is on how the program works, how well, whether it is doing what the program thinks it should be doing, whether it is doing anything it should not be doing, and similar questions.

The goal of the evaluation is getting the program to work better.

## What is evaluation

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I also benefited greatly from feedback from folks on various email lists, and I thank them all!

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