What is Program Evaluation?

Korinne Chiu, PhD
Director, Program Evaluation
Physicians for Peace
http://www.physiciansforpeace.org
What is Program Evaluation?

- Program evaluation is the application of evaluation approaches, techniques and knowledge to systematically assess and improve the planning, implementation and effectiveness of programs (Chen, 2005)
- Evaluation assesses the merit (program’s quality based on performance) or worth (the value a program’s performance has for society) of a program (Scriven, 1967)
- Program evaluation is a systematic and scientific approach to:
  - Plan and document program inputs
  - Plan and assess program activities
  - Identify gaps and challenges
  - Troubleshoot resolutions on an ongoing basis
  - Collect program data
  - Report program outputs

Why is Program Evaluation Needed?

- Without measuring need, planning cannot be rational; without effective implementation, good outcomes cannot be expected, and without achieving good outcomes, there is no reason to worry about efficiency. (Posavac and Carey, 2003).

How is it Used?

Accountability — Did the program achieve its programmatic goals and objectives as intended?

Developmental — How did the program track and refine its activities?

Knowledge — What were the outcomes of the program?

Identification of Gaps/Challenges, Resolutions and Refinement, Lessons Learned
What is Program Evaluation?

What is a Participatory Evaluation Approach?
Different evaluation approaches to evaluation may be used when conducting an evaluation. Approaches vary on the type of evaluation, the level of stakeholder involvement, and the role of the evaluator. I envision taking a participatory approach to evaluation. This entails:

- Stakeholders are central in determining values, criteria, needs and data for the evaluation
- Evaluator serves as facilitator
- Democratic evaluation process
- Stakeholder participation, dialogue, deliberation is encouraged

How is Program Evaluation Beneficial?
Properly Used Evaluation Can...

- Focus a project at the beginning
- Keep the project on track
- Make mid-course corrections
- Control costs by focusing resources
- Answer/discover critical questions
- Document success/avoid failure
- Bridge perceptions with data analysis (both quantitative and qualitative)
- Lead to more funding
- Provide evidence for program changes
- Improve organizational processes
- Provide consistent measures to assess project progress
- Assess the degree to which program and organizational goals align

(This list modified from Shuster and Braeger, 2002)
What is Program Evaluation?

Selecting the Type of Program Evaluation to Conduct

- Depends on
  - The program’s stage of development
  - Stakeholder needs
  - The overall purpose and intent of the evaluation

Types of Program Evaluation

Several evaluation types are defined below. The purposes and a sample of relevant questions asked under each evaluation type are provided.

Process (Formative) Evaluation: Assessment of processes involved in planning, implementation and transformation phases

- Measures gaps between actual and expected levels of achievement
- Mainly used to track, refine and improve programmatic efforts
- Ongoing (monthly, quarterly, annually)
- Typical Questions Addressed in Process Evaluation:
  - Is the program being implemented as intended?
  - What problems were encountered in implementing objectives? How were they resolved?
  - Have all planned activities been implemented? If not, what remains to be done? Were they accomplished on schedule?
  - If objectives, plans, or timetables were revised, why was this necessary?
  - What new objectives were added and why?
  - What changes occurred in leadership or personnel? What effect did these changes have?
  - What costs were incurred? Did they exceed initial projections?
  - What was the level of resident support in targeted areas? How did this affect the overall participation?
  - What lessons have been learned that might be useful to other programs/missions?
What is Program Evaluation?

Outcome (Summative) Evaluation: Assessment of short-term and intermediate program outputs

- Measures achievements of goals and objectives
- Not ongoing (annually, end of grant period)
- Provides information to serve in making judgments about program adoption, continuation, or expansion

- Typical Questions Addressed in Outcome Evaluation:
  - Did activities achieve intended outcomes/positive effects for clients?
  - How did the clients change, what were the consequences of these changes and what new objectives were established to respond to these changes?
  - Did the activities have any unexpected effects?
  - What groups or beneficiaries respond best/worst to the activities?
  - How can the planning of activities be improved?
  - Is the intervention producing the predicted changes in the target group/system?
  - Is the program achieving its stated objectives?

Impact Evaluation: Assessment of long-term program outcomes or net effects of a program (both intended and unintended)

- Measures impact of program beyond programmatic parameters (participants)
- Mainly used to prove program sustainability, and justify future funding
- Not ongoing (typically after the conclusion of a program or if a program has been in existence for at least a year)

- Typical Questions Addressed in Impact Evaluation:
  - Is the program effective?
  - Have the effects achieved during the program been sustained?
  - Does the program achieve the intended goal(s)?
  - Should this pilot program be scaled up? Should this large-scale program be continued?
  - Can the changes in outcomes be explained by the program, or are they the result of some other factors occurring simultaneously?
  - Do program impacts vary across different groups of intended beneficiaries (by gender, age groups or ethnic groups), regions, and/or over time?
  - Are there any unintended effects of the program, either positive or negative?
  - How effective is the program in comparison with alternative interventions?
  - Is the program worth the resources it costs?
What is Program Evaluation?

Economic Evaluation: Assessment of costs compared to benefits of the program

- Typically conducted after a program's interventions are noted as effective
- Typical Questions Addressed in Economic Evaluation:
  - Are resources being used efficiently?
  - What are a program’s costs relative to its benefits?
  - How do program costs compare to other similar programs?

What is the Difference between Research and Program Evaluation?
Research and evaluation may use the same tools and methods, but the purposes are different

- “Research seeks to prove, evaluation seeks to improve…” (Patton, 1997)
- The purpose of research is to produce generalized knowledge based on inference from a sample to a population
- The goal of research is knowledge generation
- The goal of evaluation is use
What is Program Evaluation?

References


