

Evaluation – Key questions and issues

The following notes were prepared by Michael Flood for a workshop on evaluation among community organisations. The notes are schematic rather than detailed, but they do highlight key steps and issues in evaluation. First prepared on 21 August 2008, and revised on 4 June 2009.

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(1) Introduction to evaluation

Evaluation defined

“The systematic evaluation and assessment of the features of an initiative and its effects, in order to produce information that can be used by those who have an interest in its improvement or effectiveness.” (WHO 1998: 3)

Evaluation seeks to prove and improve.

Takes place before, during and after a project.

Differences between evaluation and research, and evaluation and monitoring...

Some models of evaluation:

Descriptive; Audit; Before-After; Comparative-experimentalist; Randomised controlled experimental

More on types of evaluation: Formative and summative evaluation

3 broad roles for your evaluation

To support the development of your project (Formative evaluation).

To ensure you do it better next time (Evaluation of your processes).

To assess the final impact of your project (Summative evaluation).

(2) Planning your evaluation

Plan early

Ideally, build data collection into the project.

Reflect and decide on the evaluation's purpose.

Prepare an evaluation plan

It might include:

- Who is the evaluation is for
- Its purpose and the questions it aims to answer
- What exactly is to be evaluated
- The evaluation design
- The methodological strategy to be used to collect the data
 - Be aware of issues of time, energy, facilities, and money.
 - Address: research population (sample), method(s), and data analysis
 - Research method(s): Address why you've selected this. Show that the method is appropriate, adequate, and feasible.
 - Questions (and suppositions) and objectives here.
 - Research objectives: specific statements about exactly what the proposed project will accomplish.
 - Specify these in terms of end results, not how these will be achieved. Ideally, objectives are specific, concrete, and achievable.
 - E.g., 'to determine', 'to identify', 'to examine', 'to formulate', etc.
- The resources required and the time scale involved
 - Timetable

The plan will form the basis of an evaluation report:

A common report structure is:

- Executive Summary
- Introduction and background
- Methodology and research tools
- Findings
- Conclusions

- Recommendations
- Appendices.

(3) Why are you evaluating? Setting objectives

Key questions:

- What are the objectives and targets of the project you are evaluating?
- What baseline are you going to measure against?
- What are the objectives and targets of your evaluation?

What is the nature of your project?

Purpose: What does it aim to achieve overall?

Structure: How will it achieve this purpose?

Context: What setting or population is the focus of the project?

What is the scope and focus of your evaluation?

How will the effects of particular strategies be evaluated?

More on objectives: Make them 'SMART'

- Specific;
- Measurable;
- Achievable;
- Relevant; and
- Time-bound.

(4) What are you evaluating? Developing outcome measures

What changes does your project intend to generate?

There are various ways of understanding impacts / outcomes / results / effects...

Terminology is used inconsistently.

- How will you measure whether or not the objectives have been achieved?
- What are you going to measure: what inputs, outputs and outcomes?
- Is there a benchmark elsewhere (in another organisation, in a policy, in other evaluations, etc.) you can measure against?

- What performance indicators are you going to use: will they be quantitative or qualitative?

Further questions to help you develop outcome measures or performance indicators:

- What specific changes does your intervention seek to achieve? In attitude, behaviour, condition, status, etc.?
- What is the change your project is intended to generate? How would you know if this change had occurred? I.e., what is the phenomena in which you are interested?
- What measurable change in behaviour, attitude, condition or status would indicate progress toward your objectives?
- How will these changes be measured?

Typical questions in impact evaluations of programs

- To what extent was our program implemented?
- Did implementation lead to the stated outcomes?
 - To what extent...?
 - In what ways...?
- Where there any unanticipated outcomes?
- What were the short-term and long-term outcomes?
- What was the impact of particular strategies? And/or of the program in particular settings? And/or of the program among particular populations?
- What is it about the program or intervention that causes the particular outcome(s)? (I.e., causal questions, about the independent and dependent variables.)
- What factors or variables affect which outcomes?
- What were the mediators of change? In other words, why did change occur or not occur?

(Note that you will need different questions depending on whether you are evaluating policies, programs, or products.)

How can you assess or measure this phenomena? Measures / indicators of outcomes or impact

Indicators should have a logical link between the outcomes of the initiative (what you want to achieve) and the available evidence (what is measurable).

Are your evaluation data:

Achievable?

Relevant: Does it measure what we want it to measure?

Accessible?

Measurable?

Reliable?

Credible?

More issues and questions regarding measuring impact

Standardised measures? Benchmarks? Standards for ‘good practice’?

Short and long-term?

Of particular strategies, or in particular settings, or among particular populations

Mediators of change: not only *whether* change occurred, but *why* it occurred.

Unintended and negative impacts?

Measuring outcomes: attitudes versus behaviours

Further issues in assessing impact

Additionality

Displacement

Multipliers / linkages

(5) How are you evaluating? Methods for gathering data

What methodology and methods are right for your evaluation?

Your choice of method(s) depends on:

- The evaluation questions;
- The objectives of the program (‘SMART’: Specific; Measurable; Achievable; Relevant; and Time-bound);
- The changes which the program is intended to generate, and what these are changes *in*.

Link your data collection methods to your overall logic model / evaluation plan

Your indicators should flow logically from the overall logic model or evaluation plan. (For examples of logic models incorporating indicators, see CDC *Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence Prevention Programs Evaluation Guide*, pp. 76-79.)

More issues and questions on measuring impact:

- Standardised measures? Benchmarks? Standards for ‘good practice’?
- Short and long-term?
- Of particular strategies, or in particular settings, or among particular populations
- Mediators of change: not only *whether* change occurred, but *why* it occurred.
- Unintended and negative impacts?

How will you achieve truthful (valid) and trustworthy (reliable) information?

Validity: the degree to which the research findings are true.

Reliability: the degree to which the results of the research are repeatable.

What methods will you use?

General pointers on choosing methods

- Match your methods to the evaluation question(s) you want to answer.
- Match your methods to your resources.
- Match your methods to your target population and setting.
- Consider using multiple sources or methods for data collection.

Quantitative and qualitative research strategies

Quantitative and qualitative research are distinct, but also overlapping.

Quantitative research

- Collections information or data in the form of numbers: counts, percentages, averages, etc.
- Typically involves finding variables for concepts, operationalising them in the study, and measuring them.
- Some typical methods: social surveys, analysis of previously collected data, and ‘structured’ observation.

Qualitative research

- Collects information or data in the form of words, ideas, themes, and meanings.
- More likely to work in ‘interpretivist’ tradition.
- More likely to use language of case studies and social contexts.

- Addresses smaller number of cases, examined in their social and cultural context, sometimes to develop grounded theories. Researcher interacts with the objects of study.

Research strategies versus research methods...

- It is useful to distinguish between quantitative and qualitative *research strategies*, on the one hand, and quantitative and qualitative *methods*, on the other (Grix 2004: 123).

More on method:

Use your methods well.

Most methods can be used in either or both quantitative and qualitative research strategies.

Choose your methods according to the questions you wish to ask.

What method(s) will you use to gather information?

Interview

Structured

Semi-structured

Group interview

Focus group

Questionnaire, Survey

Observation

Participation observation. E.g., ethnography

Non-participant observation

Textual analysis. Including of archives, documents, print media, etc. Can involve:

Content analysis

Discourse analysis

Existing data

Sampling

The logic of sampling

- Two sets of reasons that this work involves some form of sampling or selection:
 - Practical and resource-based
 - Focus

- You have to work out relationship between your data and a wider population or universe in which you are interested.
- Two broad kinds of relationship between your sample and a wider population or universe:
 - Sampling *strategically*: To produce a relevant range of contexts or phenomena – of experiences, characteristics, processes, types, contexts, etc. Based on selecting those which will enable you to develop and test your argument.
 - Sampling *representationally*: Where the sample is representative of a wider population or universe.
- (Note that one also may sample to generalise or extrapolate to wider *theoretical propositions* rather than populations.)

How will you generate this sample?

Two main types of sampling

- Probability: Broadly equivalent to random sampling. Generates representative samples.
 - Simple random sampling
 - Systematic random sampling: where select participants using some kind of system, e.g. every 10th individual.
- Non-probability
 - Convenience sampling
 - Purposive or theoretical sampling
 - Snowball sampling
 - Quota sampling
 - Self-selected sampling

Other ways to sample in qualitative research:

- Extreme or deviant case sampling: cases with distinctive characteristics that illustrate the processes being examined.
- Typical case sampling:
- Critical case sampling: cases that illustrate processes in contexts where these processes would be thought least likely.

How big a sample?

- What is a big enough sample? When the data are rich enough and cover enough of the dimensions in which you are interested.

- In purposive sampling, intended to create rich and in-depth information, you continue sampling until no new information is forthcoming.

Your sampling in practice

- Shaped by: access, strategic interests, representational interests...
- Likely to be sampling both strategically and representationally: interest in examining particular processes and contexts, *and* in generalising to other or wider processes, contexts, settings, and populations.
- Likely to include:
 - Convenience sampling: people who are readily available
 - Purposive sampling: including e.g of people who possess distinctive characteristics and can provide distinctive contributions to the evaluation. E.g., key informants...

Logistics:

- who is going to gather the data?
- who will analyse it?
- how they will liaise with you in carrying out the work?
- who is going to write the report? (*Passport to Evaluation: 79*)

(6) Analysing your data

Your quantitative analyses are likely to involve:

- Frequencies (counts of a particular response, behaviour, or other item of interest);
- Percentages;
- Means (averages) and modes (the most frequently occurring item or response);
- Perhaps some simple statistical tests, e.g. t-tests.

Your qualitative analyses are likely to involve:

- Descriptions of patterns and themes;
- Examinations of particular issues;
- Detailed accounts of particular processes or incidents or settings or other phenomena of interest;
- Quotes, anecdotes, and other illustrative material.

See pp. 93-109 of the CDC's *Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence Prevention Programs Evaluation Guide* (2007) for further material on data analysis and reporting.

(7) Utilising and disseminating your findings

(8) Checklist for Planning Your Evaluation

Introduction

The following provides a list of key issues in planning and designing your evaluation. It focuses on the key steps in planning an evaluation, and does not address further steps in conducting your evaluation.

Aspects of your evaluation plan may be tentative at this stage and some may change as the program develops.

Also see the further resources listed at the end of this document. For example, the ‘Passport to Evaluation’ (online) provides a valuable, accessible outline of how to put together an evaluation.

<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of the evaluation has been clearly defined, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The evaluation’s scope and focus; ○ The questions it will address; ○ The intended audience. 	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The intended audience. 	
<p>Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evaluation’s objectives have been developed and identified: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The evaluation plan includes a series of SMART objectives; ○ (Related to this) The plan identifies the specific changes which the project intends to achieve or generate. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The evaluation plan includes a series of SMART objectives; 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ (Related to this) The plan identifies the specific changes which the project intends to achieve or generate. 	
<p>Measures and data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures have been identified or developed to assess the project’s outcomes, effects, or impacts (‘outcome measures’ or ‘performance indicators’): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ These allow direct assessment of the project’s achievement of its objectives (that is, they are relevant); ○ These can be used to examine the effects of particular strategies, or particular settings, or among particular populations; ○ The plan includes relevant benchmarks and baselines; ○ The plan identifies the data associated with these measures; ○ The data to be collected are achievable and accessible, measurable, valid (relevant), and reliable. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ These allow direct assessment of the project’s achievement of its objectives (that is, they are relevant); 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ These can be used to examine the effects of particular strategies, or particular settings, or among particular populations; 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The plan includes relevant benchmarks and baselines; 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The plan identifies the data associated with these measures; 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The data to be collected are achievable and accessible, measurable, valid (relevant), and reliable. 	

<p>Methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan identifies and discusses the method(s) to be used to gather data. 	
<p>Further logistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan addresses further dimensions of its method of evaluation, including: 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who will gather the data; 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who will analyse the data; 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who will write the report; 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The timelines for evaluation. 	

(9) Some resources (updated, May 2009)

Please note that many of the resources listed other than in the “Online” section *also* are available online.

Online:

General guides to evaluation planning

Planning for effective health promotion evaluation:

http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/downloads/planning_may05.pdf

CDC evaluation resource: <http://www.cdc.gov/eval/resources.htm>

Evaluation Cookbook: <http://www.icbl.hw.ac.uk/ltdi/cookbook/contents.html#endhead>

Basic Guide to Program Evaluation: http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/fnl_eval.htm

Evaluation publications: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evaldocs.html>

Program Managers’ Guide to Evaluation:

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/other_resrch/pm_guide_eval/reports/pmguide/pmguide_toc.html

Taking Stock: A Practical Guide to Evaluating Your Own Programs (1997):

http://www.horizon-research.com/reports/1997/taking_stock.php

Understanding Evaluation: The Way to Better Prevention Programs (1993):

<http://www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/handbook.pdf>

User-friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation (2002):

<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2002/nsf02057/start.htm>

Practical Evaluation of Public Health Programs (2001): <http://www2a.cdc.gov/phtn/pract-eval/workbook.asp>

http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthpromotion/resources_links/integrated.htm

<http://www.csip-plus.org.uk/RowanDocs/EvaluationGuide.pdf>

<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/downloads/rcuk/publications/evaluationguide.pdf>

<http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf>

http://www.organizationalresearch.com/publications_and_resources.htm

Logic models

W.G. Kellogg Foundation. (2004). *Logic Model Development Guide*. Michigan: W.G. Kellogg Foundation. (<http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub3669.pdf>)

Everything you wanted to know about logic models but were afraid to ask:

<http://www.insites.org/documents/logmod.pdf>

Developing a logic model: Teaching and training guide (2008):
<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/pdf/lmguidecomplete.pdf>

CDC evaluation resource – Logic models:
<http://www.cdc.gov/eval/resources.htm#logic%20model>

Further references

Annie Casey Foundation. (2004). *A Practical Guide to Documenting Influence and Leverage in Making Connections Communities*. Seattle, WA: Organizational Research Services.

Annie Casey Foundation. (2007). *A Handbook of Data Collection Tools: Companion to “A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy”*. Seattle, WA: Organizational Research Services.

Annie Casey Foundation. (2007). *A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy*. Seattle, WA: Organizational Research Services.

Burt, Martha R., Adele V. Harrell, Lisa C. Newmark, Laudan Y. Aron, Lisa K. Jacobs, and others. (1997). *Evaluation Guidebook For Projects Funded By S.T.O.P. Formula Grants Under The Violence Against Women Act*, Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Grembowski, David. (2001). *The practice of health program evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

Pawson, Ray. (2006). *Evidence-based policy: a realist perspective*. London: Sage.

Pawson, Ray, and Nicholas Tilley. (1997). *Realistic evaluation*. London: Sage.

Rossi, Peter H., Mark W. Lipsey, and Howard E. Freeman. (2004). *Evaluation: A systematic approach*, 7th ed. . Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

Wadsworth, Yoland. (1991). *Everyday evaluation on the run*. Melbourne: Action Research Issues Association, Melbourne.

Wadsworth, Yoland, and Jane Wexler. (1991). *Manual of notes for convening an introductory workshop on evaluation: work-in progress*. Melbourne: Action Research Issues Association, Melbourne.

Resources on methods of data collection and analysis

Short, simple overviews:

Home Office, Gathering data, *Passport to Evaluation* part 3, pp. 64, 74-87 (including pp. 78-80, offering a summary table on methods):
http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/learningzone/passport_to_evaluation.htm

CSIP Evaluation Guide, pp. 7-11. <http://www.csip-plus.org.uk/RowanDocs/EvaluationGuide.pdf>

CDC *Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence Prevention Programs Evaluation Guide*, pp. 65-80.

More detailed overview of research methods:

Grix, Jonathan. (2004). *The Foundations of Research*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan (Chapter 7, pp. 116-137). Silverman, David. (2005). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook* (2nd edition). London: Sage (Chapter 8, "Choosing a Methodology").