**Some Major Types of Program Evaluation**

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When designing your evaluation approach, it may be helpful to review the following three types of evaluations, which are rather common in organizations. Note that you should not design your evaluation approach simply by choosing which of the following three types you will use -- you should design your evaluation approach by carefully addressing the above key considerations.

**Goals-Based Evaluation**

Often programs are established to meet one or more specific goals. These goals are often described in the original program plans.

Goal-based evaluations are evaluating the extent to which programs are meeting predetermined goals or objectives. Questions to ask yourself when designing an evaluation to see if you reached your goals, are:

1. How were the program goals (and objectives, is applicable) established? Was the process effective?

2. What is the status of the program's progress toward achieving the goals?

3. Will the goals be achieved according to the timelines specified in the program implementation or operations plan? If not, then why?

4. Do personnel have adequate resources (money, equipment, facilities, training, etc.) to achieve the goals?

5. How should priorities be changed to put more focus on achieving the goals? (Depending on the context, this question might be viewed as a program management decision, more than an evaluation question.)

6. How should timelines be changed (be careful about making these changes - know why efforts are behind schedule before timelines are changed)?

7. How should goals be changed (be careful about making these changes - know why efforts are not achieving the goals before changing the goals)? Should any goals be added or removed? Why?

8. How should goals be established in the future?

**Process-Based Evaluations**

Process-based evaluations are geared to fully understanding how a program works -- how does it produce that results that it does. These evaluations are useful if programs are long-standing and have changed over the years, employees or customers report a large number of complaints about the program, there appear to be large inefficiencies in delivering program services and they are also useful for accurately portraying to outside parties how a program truly operates (e.g., for replication elsewhere).

There are numerous questions that might be addressed in a process evaluation. These questions can be selected by carefully considering what is important to know about the program. Examples of questions to ask yourself when designing an evaluation to understand and/or closely examine the processes in your programs, are:

1. On what basis do employees and/or the customers decide that products or services are needed?

2. What is required of employees in order to deliver the product or services?

3. How are employees trained about how to deliver the product or services?

4. How do customers or clients come into the program?

5. What is required of customers or client?

6. How do employees select which products or services will be provided to the customer or client?

7. What is the general process that customers or clients go through with the product or program?

8. What do customers or clients consider to be strengths of the program?

9. What do staff consider to be strengths of the product or program?

10. What typical complaints are heard from employees and/or customers?

11. What do employees and/or customers recommend to improve the product or program?

12. On what basis do employees and/or the customer decide that the product or services are no longer needed?

**Outcomes-Based Evaluation**

Program evaluation with an outcomes focus is increasingly important for nonprofits and asked for by funders. An outcomes-based evaluation facilitates you asking if your organization is really doing the right program activities to bring about the outcomes you believe (or better yet, you've verified) to be needed by your clients (rather than just engaging in busy activities which seem reasonable to do at the time). Outcomes are benefits to clients from participation in the program. Outcomes are usually in terms of enhanced learning (knowledge, perceptions/attitudes or skills) or conditions, e.g., increased literacy, self-reliance, etc. Outcomes are often confused with program outputs or units of services, e.g., the number of clients who went through a program.

The following information is a top-level summary of information from the United Way of America.

To accomplish an outcomes-based evaluation, you should first pilot, or test, this evaluation approach on one or two programs at most (before doing all programs).

The general steps to accomplish an outcomes-based evaluation include to:

1. Identify the major outcomes that you want to examine or verify for the program under evaluation. You might reflect on your mission (the overall purpose of your organization) and ask yourself what impacts you will have on your clients as you work towards your mission. For example, if your overall mission is to provide shelter and resources to abused women, then ask yourself what benefits this will have on those women if you effectively provide them shelter and other services or resources. As a last resort, you might ask yourself, "What major activities are we doing now?" and then for each activity, ask "Why are we doing that?" The answer to this "Why?" question is usually an outcome. This "last resort" approach, though, may just end up justifying ineffective activities you are doing now, rather than examining what you should be doing in the first place.

2. Choose the outcomes that you want to examine, prioritize the outcomes and, if your time and resources are limited, pick the top two to four most important outcomes to examine for now.

3. For each outcome, specify what observable measures, or indicators, will suggest that you're achieving that key outcome with your clients. This is often the most important and enlightening step in outcomes-based evaluation. However, it is often the most challenging and even confusing step, too, because you're suddenly going from a rather intangible concept, e.g., increased self-reliance, to specific activities, e.g., supporting clients to get themselves to and from work, staying off drugs and alcohol, etc. It helps to have a "devil's advocate" during this phase of identifying indicators, i.e., someone who can question why you can assume that an outcome was reached because certain associated indicators were present.

4. Specify a "target" goal of clients, i.e., what number or percent of clients you commit to achieving specific outcomes with, e.g., "increased self-reliance (an outcome) for 70% of adult, African American women living in the inner city of Minneapolis as evidenced by the following measures (indicators) ..."

5. Identify what information is needed to show these indicators, e.g., you'll need to know how many clients in the target group went through the program, how many of them reliably undertook their own transportation to work and stayed off drugs, etc. If your program is new, you may need to evaluate the process in the program to verify that the program is indeed carried out according to your original plans. (Michael Patton, prominent researcher, writer and consultant in evaluation, suggests that the most important type of evaluation to carry out may be this implementation evaluation to verify that your program ended up to be implemented as you originally planned.)

6. Decide how can that information be efficiently and realistically gathered (see Selecting Which Methods to Use below). Consider program documentation, observation of program personnel and clients in the program, questionnaires and interviews about clients perceived benefits from the program, case studies of program failures and successes, etc. You may not need all of the above. (see Overview of Methods to Collect Information below).

7. Analyze and report the findings (see Analyzing and Interpreting Information below).

**Overview of Methods to Collect Information**

The following table provides an overview of the major methods used for collecting data during evaluations.

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| **Method** | **Overall Purpose** | **Advantages** | **Challenges** |
| questionnaires, surveys, checklists | when need to quickly and/or easily get lots of information from people in a non-threatening way | -can complete anonymously-inexpensive to administer-easy to compare and analyze-administer to many people-can get lots of data-many sample questionnaires already exist | -might not get careful feedback-wording can bias client's responses-are impersonal-in surveys, may need sampling expert- doesn't get full story |
| interviews | when want to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences, or learn more about their answers to questionnaires | -get full range and depth of information-develops relationship with client-can be flexible with client | -can take much time-can be hard to analyze and compare-can be costly-interviewer can bias client's responses |
| documentation review | when want impression of how program operates without interrupting the program; is from review of applications, finances, memos, minutes, etc. | -get comprehensive and historical information-doesn't interrupt program or client's routine in program-information already exists-few biases about information | -often takes much time-info may be incomplete-need to be quite clear about what looking for-not flexible means to get data; data restricted to what already exists |
| observation | to gather accurate information about how a program actually operates, particularly about processes | -view operations of a program as they are actually occurring-can adapt to events as they occur | -can be difficult to interpret seen behaviors-can be complex to categorize observations-can influence behaviors of program participants-can be expensive |
| focus groups | explore a topic in depth through group discussion, e.g., about reactions to an experience or suggestion, understanding common complaints, etc.; useful in evaluation and marketing | -quickly and reliably get common impressions -can be efficient way to get much range and depth of information in short time- can convey key information about programs | -can be hard to analyze responses-need good facilitator for safety and closure-difficult to schedule 6-8 people together |
| case studies | to fully understand or depict client's experiences in a program, and conduct comprehensive examination through cross comparison of cases | -fully depicts client's experience in program input, process and results-powerful means to portray program to outsiders | -usually quite time consuming to collect, organize and describe -represents depth of information, rather than breadth |