

When Is a Good Time for Evaluation?

Bernadette Wright, PhD and Ladel Lewis, PhD, August 22, 2014

Leaders who are focused on running their organizations often do not think about evaluation until a financial supporter demands evidence that they are accomplishing what they set out to do.

The problem is this means these organizations are missing valuable opportunities to gain insights that could help them to increase their effectiveness. Evaluation can provide knowledge to inform project planning, design, implementation, and growth, in addition to demonstrating results.

Leaders who incorporate evaluation and strategic research from the start of their projects can discover opportunities and strategies that others miss. This may enable them to improve upon effective practices and establish themselves as leaders in their field.

The table below shows example questions that evaluations can investigate that are often relevant in the various stages of a project and example uses of the findings.

“Evaluation research is the systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the conceptualization, design, implementation, and utility of social intervention programs.”

Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman,
Evaluation: A Systematic Approach, 1993

| Example Evaluation Questions | Example Uses for Evaluation Results |
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| Needs Assessment and Project Design | |

Is a new idea practical, viable, and desirable?

What do people consider successful outcomes?

What is the nature and scope of the problem we’re addressing?

What strategies have and have not worked in the past?

What are others in the field doing, and how does that affect our activities?

What will it take to achieve desired results?



Design more effect programs, products, policies, and strategies.

Reduce risk of failure before investing in new ways of doing things.

Demonstrate the significance and value of your plan to financial supporters, your board, and other stakeholders, to increase chances for funding and support.

Example Evaluation Questions

Example Uses for Evaluation Results

Implementation

Did program development, enrollment, and participation happen as expected?
Why or why not? What changes did we make?

What processes and strategies affect odds of success?

What should be continued, what can be discarded, and what should be changed?

Contribute to knowledge in your field; model effective practices for others to follow.

Increase your efficiency and performance.

Make your case in advocating for changes in laws, regulations, and government programs.

Impact Assessment

Are we having the effects we expected? If not, why not? What unexpected effects are we having?

What are the effects for different groups, including those with greatest need?

How does our model compare with alternative options to solve the problem?

How important is the role of each key program feature and strategy to achieving results?

Be accountable to financial supporters, your board, people served, and the public.

Raise awareness of the value you are delivering, so you can grow your program and help more people.

Improve coordination and collaboration.

Develop fair and reliable outcomes-based contracts and payment systems.

Increase your effectiveness.

Sustainability and Growth

How can we align our new model with related existing efforts?

How can we sustain our new model and make it part of the system?

How can it work in other places?

Continue and spread your new way of doing things to become part of an improved system.

Spread your work to benefit more people.

Become a national model for others to follow.

If you have any questions or would like assistance, contact us at:
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