

Evaluation Research

Note:

*Some of the material on these slides is
derived from the Centers for Disease Control*

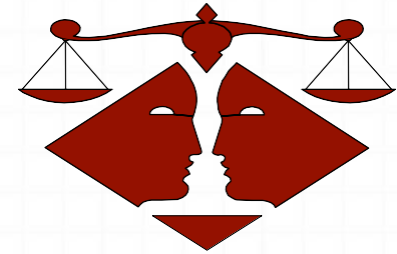
De@initions

- ❏ Evaluation research, sometimes called *program evaluation*, refers to a research purpose rather than a specific method.
- ❏ This purpose is to evaluate the impact of social interventions such as new treatment methods, innovations in services, and a host of others.
- ❏ Evaluation research is a form of applied research—it is intended to have some real-world effect.
- ❏ Many methods, like surveys and experiments can be used in evaluation research.
- ❏ In recent years, the field of evaluation research has become an increasingly popular and active research specialty, as reflected in textbooks, courses, and projects.

Research vs. Evaluation



- Production of generalizable knowledge
- Researcher-derived questions
- Paradigm stance
- More controlled setting
- Clearer role
- Often published
- Clearer allegiance



- Knowledge intended for use
- Program- or funder-derived questions
- Judgmental quality
- Action setting
- Role conflicts more likely
- Often not published
- Multiple allegiances

**“Research seeks to *prove*,
evaluation seeks to *improve*...”**

M.Q. Patton

Surveillance & Monitoring vs. Program Evaluation

Surveillance -tracks diseases, problems, or risky behaviors

Monitoring -tracks changes in program outcomes over time

Evaluation -seeks to understand specifically why these changes occur

Topics Appropriate to Evaluation Research

- ◆◆ Evaluation research is appropriate whenever some social intervention occurs or is planned.
- ◆◆ Social intervention is an action taken within a social context for the purpose of producing some intended result.
- ◆◆ In its simplest sense, *evaluation research* is the process of determining whether a social intervention has produced the intended result.
- ◆◆ The topics appropriate for evaluation research are limitless.
- ◆◆ The questions appropriate for evaluation research are of great practical significance: jobs, programs, and investments as well as values and beliefs.

What Can be Evaluated?

- **Direct service interventions**
- **Community mobilization efforts**
- **Research initiatives**
- **Surveillance & monitoring systems**
- **Policy development activities**
- **Problem/crisis investigations**
- **Client Assessments**
- **Communication systems**
- **Infrastructure-building**
- **Training and educational services & staff qualifications**
- **Administrative systems**

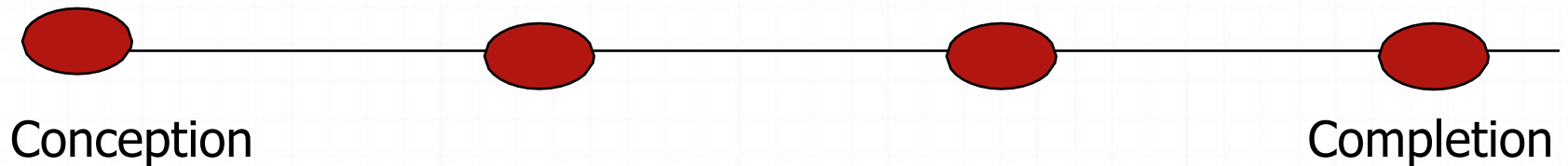
When to Conduct Evaluation?

**Planning a
NEW program**

**Assessing a
DEVELOPING program**

**Assessing a
STABLE/MATURE Program**

**Assessing a Program
that has ENDED**



The *stage of program development* influences the reason for program evaluation.

Why Evaluate Programs?

- ◆◆ To **gain insight** about a program and its operations – to see where we are going and where we are coming from, and to find out what works and what doesn't
- ◆◆ To **improve practice** – to modify or adapt practice to enhance the success of activities
- ◆◆ To **assess effects** – to see how well we are meeting objectives and goals, how the program benefits the community, and to provide evidence of effectiveness
- ◆◆ To **build capacity** -increase funding, enhance skills, strengthen accountability

Steps in Program Evaluation

Step 1: Engage the Stakeholders

Step 2: Describe the Program

Step 3: Focus the Evaluation Design

Step 4: Gather Credible Evidence Step

5: Justify Conclusions

Step 6: Ensure Use & Share Lessons Learned

Identifying Stakeholders

Who are the stakeholders?

- ✓✓ Persons involved in program operations
- ✓✓ Persons served or affected by the program
- ✓✓ Intended users of evaluation findings

What is their interest in the program?

- ✓✓ Do they support the program?
- ✓✓ Are they skeptical about or antagonistic toward the program?

Identifying Stakeholders

❖❖ Persons Involved in Program Operations

➤➤ Staff and Partners

❖❖ Persons affected or served by the program

➤➤ Clients, their families and social networks, providers and community groups

❖❖ Intended users of the evaluation findings

➤➤ Policymakers, managers, administrators, advocates, funders, and others

❖❖ **Be Sure to Include both Supporters and Skeptics!**

Engaging Stakeholders

Stakeholders should be involved in...

- ✓✓ Describing program activities, context, and priorities
- ✓✓ Defining problems
- ✓✓ Selecting evaluation questions and methods
- ✓✓ Serving as data sources
- ✓✓ Defining what constitutes the “proof” of success
- ✓✓ Interpreting findings
- ✓✓ Disseminating information
- ✓✓ Implementing results

Working with Stakeholders

Identify stakeholders for your program

- ✓✓ Those involved in program operations
- ✓✓ Persons served or affected by the program
- ✓✓ Intended users of evaluation findings

Think about which ones you need most for...

- ✓✓ Credibility
- ✓✓ Implementation
- ✓✓ Advocacy
- ✓✓ Funding

List ways to keep them engaged

Formulating the Problem:

Issues of Measurement

- ◆◆ **Problem: What is the purpose of the intervention to be evaluated?**
- ◆◆ **This question often produces vague results.**
- ◆◆ **A common problem is measuring the “unmeasurable.”**
- ◆◆ **Evaluation research is a matter of finding out whether something is there or not there, whether something happened or did not happen.**
- ◆◆ **To conduct evaluation research, we must be able to operationalize, observe, and measure.**

What is the outcome, or the *response variable*?

- ☐☐☐ If a social program is intended to accomplish something, we must be able to measure that something.
- ☐☐☐ It is essential to achieve agreements on definitions in advance.
- ☐☐☐ In some cases you may find that the definitions of a problem and a sufficient solution are defined by law or by agency regulations; if so you must be aware of such specifications and accommodate them.

Operationalizing Success/Failure

- ◆ Potentially one of the most taxing aspects of evaluation research is determining whether the program under review succeeded or failed.
- ◆ Definitions of “success” and “failure” can be rather difficult, and these are usually not binary, but on a scale.

Cost-Bene@tAnalysis

How much does the program cost in relation to what it returns in bene5its?

- ✓✓ **If the bene5its outweigh the cost, keep the program going.**
- ✓✓ **If the reverse, change it or ‘junk it’.**
- ✓✓ **Unfortunately this is not an appropriate analysis to make if thinking only in terms of money.**

Ultimately, the criteria of success and failure are often a matter of agreement.

The people responsible for the program may commit themselves in advance to a particular outcome that will be regarded as an indication of success.

Measurement in Evaluation

- ❖ Researchers must take measurement quite seriously in evaluation research, carefully determining all the variables to be measured and getting appropriate measures for each.
- ❖ Such decisions are often not purely scientific ones.
- ❖ Evaluation researchers often must work out their measurement strategy with the people responsible for the program being evaluated.
- ❖ There is also a significant political aspect.

Additional Issues and Implications

The Social Context

- ✓✓ Evaluation research has a special propensity for running into problems.
- ✓✓ Logistical problems
- ✓✓ Ethical problems

Three important reasons why the implications of the evaluation research results are not always put into practice.

- ✓✓ The implications may not always be presented in a way that the non-researchers can understand.
- ✓✓ Evaluation results sometimes contradict deeply held beliefs
- ✓✓ Vested interests in the programs assert their influence