

What is program evaluation?

A beginners guide

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Free Resources for Methods in Program Evaluation
<http://gsociology.icaap.org/methods>

What is evaluation

This is the second in a set of handouts on the key questions about program evaluation.

This handout starts with the second part of evaluation: What is the evaluation question?

One way to find the question is for the evaluator and program people to develop a very good description of:

- what the outcomes should be,
- how the program will get there, and
- why the program leads to the outcome.

This description helps to identify how the program should lead to the outcome, why the program activities should lead to the outcomes, and where to evaluate the program to check whether it does.

This method is called a *program theory*.

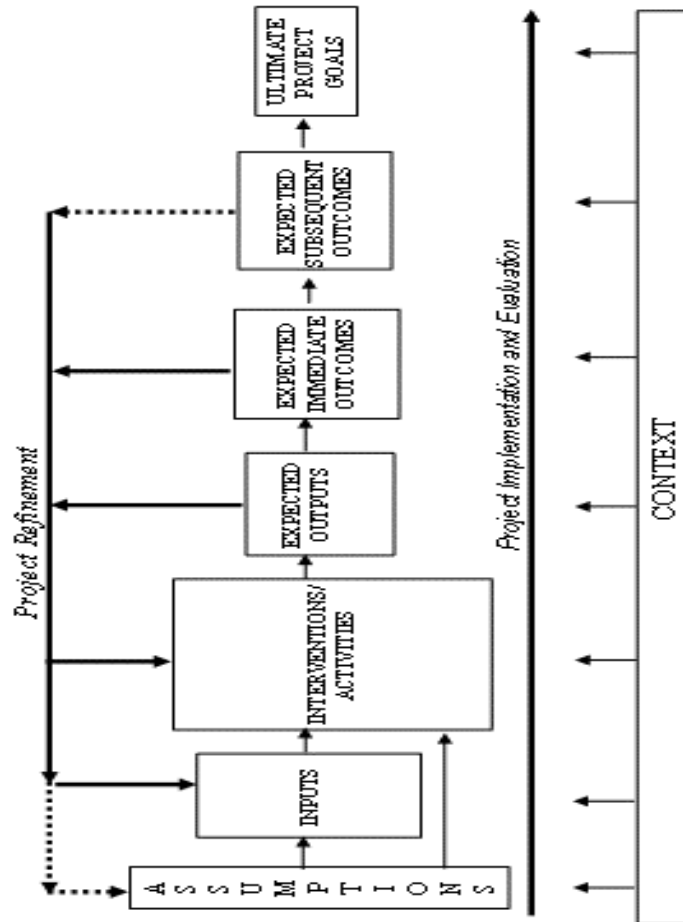
“A program theory explains how and why a program is supposed to work. ... It provides a logical and reasonable description of why the things you do – your program activities – should lead to the intended results or benefits.”

From Program Evaluation Tip Sheets from Wilder Research, Issue 4, October 2005 - Program Theory. http://www.ojp.state.mn.us/grants/Program_Evaluation/

A useful tool to help work with the program theory is a *logic model*, which visually shows the program theory, how all the program goals, activities, and expected outcomes link together.

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Logic model example:



from
Creating and Using the Logic Model for Performance Management.
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/resources/logic_model/section1.html

What is evaluation

Use the program theory or logic model to come up with evaluation questions

- Does the program have a positive outcome?
- Are people satisfied?
- How could the program be improved?
- How well is the program working?
- Is the program working the way it was intended to work?

Additional Resources

Developing Evaluation Questions
David B. Langmeyer, Ph.D., Gail S. Huntington, Ph.D.
ARCH National Resource Center for Respite and Crisis Care Services
<http://www.archrespite.org/archfs13.htm>

Developing Process Evaluation Questions. At the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Healthy Youth. Program Evaluation Resources
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/resources.htm>

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However, there are limits to program theory and logic models:

- Models are linear, programs are complex, interactive
- Models are static, programs may change over time.
- Models may not take unexpected consequences into account
- Models may not account for conflict, power, control issues
- Theory or model assumes the model is correct.

Use program theory and logic models, but be flexible, and open to change and feedback. Review and revise them often, as necessary.

Additional Resources about logic models.

Usable Knowledge's Interactive logic model tutorial
http://www.usablellc.net/html/links_we_like.html#logic_models

Program logic - an introduction
from Audience Dialogue
<http://www.audiencedialogue.net/proglog.html>

From: Logic Model Basics. At the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Healthy Youth. Program Evaluation Resources
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/resources.htm>

A Guide on Logic Model Development for CDCs Prevention Research Centers (Sundra, Scherer, and Anderson)
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/evaluation/guide/pe4.htm>

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I also benefited greatly from feedback from folks on various email lists, and I thank them all!

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