What is program evaluation?

A beginners guide

What is evaluation

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

Surveys are a set of questions that are asked of everyone in the same way.

Surveys can answer question about how many and how often. For example:

- How many clients are satisfied with services?
- How often do people have difficulties using the services?

Typical questions might be like this:

How satisfied are you with the program?

very satisfied neither dissatisfied very satisfied dissatisfied

How did you hear about the program? Check all that apply.

- Radio
- TV
- friends
- other _____________________

Surveys might be used to describe the entire client population, if respondents were chosen randomly or systematically (see next page) and if the sample is sufficiently large.
What is evaluation

**Randomly or systematically** choosing people to respond to surveys means using some defined method to select people. **For example:**

- **Systematic selection** – a typical method is to start with the 5th person and then select every 7th person after that. The numbers, the 5th and the 7th, are chosen randomly.

- **Randomly select locations to be in the sample, and then survey everyone in that location.**

- **Group locations, randomly select sites within groups, then systematic selection of people at selected sites.**

Random or systematic selection means that the group of people you select are more likely to be similar to your clients, in general. You aren't excluding any particular groups, or including only certain groups. You are avoiding bias, in sampling terms.

If you do use random or systematic selection, then most likely you can use your results to make conclusions about your clients.

If you don't use random or systematic selection, you can NOT use the results of your survey to make conclusions about your client population. That is, you cannot generalize from your study to your client population. You can only say “The people who took this survey said ...”

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**Additional resource**

G. David Garson Statnotes, chapters on Surveys and Sampling

http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/PA765/survey.htm

http://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/PA765/sampling.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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