

# What is program evaluation?

## A beginners guide

### Produced by

Gene Shackman, Ph.D.  
Free Resources for Program Evaluation  
<http://gsociology.icaap.org/methods>

## What is evaluation

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

This handout starts with the first question: What is program evaluation?

People often think of program evaluation as looking to answer this question:

- Does the program work? And how can it be improved?

However, there are many equally important questions

- Is the program worthwhile?
- Are there alternatives that would be better?
- Are there unintended consequences?
- Are the program goals appropriate and useful?

That is, an evaluation can help a program improve their services, but can also help ensure that the program is delivering the **right** services.

See this resource for additional information:

Evaluation 101, Juliana M. Blome  
NIH <http://publications.nigms.nih.gov/more/ppts/blome/>  
Slides 3 and 4

## What is evaluation

Evaluation is a systematic assessment. Evaluations should follow a systematic and mutually agreed on plan. Plans will typically include the following:

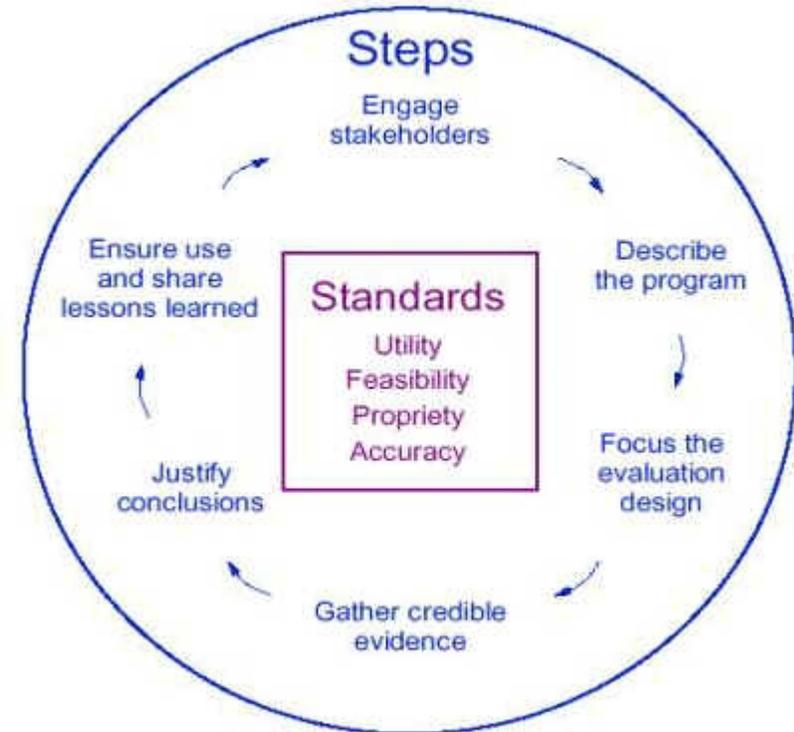
- Determining the goal of the evaluation: What is the evaluation question, what is the evaluation to find out.
- How will the evaluation answer the question: What methods will be used.
- Making the results useful, how will the results be reported so that they can be used by the organization to make improvements.

### Additional resources about evaluation:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health. MMWR 1999;48(No. RR-11). <http://www.cdc.gov/eval/framework.htm>

## What is evaluation

Evaluation is a process



The process is a continuous feedback loop. Each step provides information useful in the following steps.

## What is evaluation

The process involves:

- Getting stakeholders (people involved in the program) actively involved in the evaluation
- Developing a complete understanding of the program
- Using the knowledge to determine what information is needed and how to gather it.
- Gathering the evidence
- Interpreting the evidence, making sure it makes sense.
- Using the results, making sure they are useful, getting stakeholders to use them, which depends on stakeholder involvement throughout the evaluation process.
- Following up, continuing communication among all involved, about the evaluation, implementing any recommendations, sharing feedback about the evaluation.

Diagram and information from:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Framework for Program Evaluation in Public Health. MMWR 1999;48(No. RR-11).  
<http://www.cdc.gov/eval/framework.htm>

## What is evaluation

Copyright by Gene Shackman, July 2008. Revised and copyright renewed November 2009

This handout can be freely distributed without need for permission, provided it is distributed as is. Distribution for any commercial purpose is strictly forbidden. This handout cannot be sold under any circumstances.

This handout is for education only. It does not represent any guidelines or requirements about program evaluation. The only purpose is to educate consumers, students, and evaluators, so that evaluators and clients might work better together to get more out of their evaluation.

In my work on this handout, I do not represent or speak for any organization. I prepared this on my own time, at home, and was not supported by any organization.

Materials on web sites listed in this handout do not necessarily reflect my opinions, nor do I assume any responsibility for the content provided at web sites listed in this handout. Listing a website is not necessarily endorsement of any services or organization. The sites are only listed because they have some free information. I do not have any financial relationships with any site or organization listed on this handout.

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

**The most recent version of this handout is always at**  
**<http://gsociology.icaap.org/methods/>**