

# Evaluating Your Project



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# Agenda

## Part 1: Introduction to Evaluation

- Why Evaluate?
- When to Evaluate?
- How to Evaluate?

## Part 2: Concluding Thoughts

- Evaluation Tips



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

*M.Q. Patton*



# Why Evaluate?



- To **plan** – answer if and how
- To **gain insight** – what's working, what isn't
- To **improve practice** – modify or adapt to enhance success
- To **assess effect, outcome, impact** – objectives and goals being met, stakeholder benefit, evidence of effectiveness

# When to Evaluate?



Planning a  
NEW project

Assessing a  
DEVELOPING  
project

Assessing a  
STABLE, MATURE  
project

Assessing a  
project after it  
has ENDED



Formative  
(Conception)

Summative  
(Completion)

The **stage of development and desired information** influence reason and type of evaluation

# When to Evaluate: Types of Evaluation



Needs  
Assessment

Process  
Evaluation

Formative  
Evaluation

Outcome  
Evaluation

Summative  
Evaluation

# When: Needs Assessment



- **Approaches to Needs Assessment:**
  - Determine what “need” is
  - Allow stakeholders to help define the relevant factors
  - Search for evidence of the problem or lack thereof
  
- **Questions:**
  - ✦ What are the characteristics, needs, priorities of target population?
  - ✦ What are potential barriers/facilitators for the project?
  - ✦ What are the most appropriate actions and steps to take and in what order?

# When: Process Evaluation



- **Approaches to Process Evaluation:**
  - **Plan vs. Reality**
    - Reveals how a plan is actually implemented
  - **Detailed data on the process:**
    - When effective
    - When not effective
    - Sometimes why
  - **Allows for changes/adjustments mid-stream**
  - **Questions**
    - How is the project being implemented? Has the delivery of service been adequate, uniform?
    - Are activities delivered as intended? Implementation as planned?
    - Are participants, key players, and others being reached as intended?



# When: Outcome Evaluation



- **Approaches to Outcome Evaluation:**
  - Did change occur as a result of efforts
    - Tries to link change to a specific activity undertaken
  - **Questions**
    - To what extent did desired changes occur? Were intended goals met?
    - Who benefited/not benefited? How?
    - What seemed to work? Not work?
    - What were unintended outcomes?

# How: Data Collection Methods



- **Quantitative versus Qualitative?**
  - Often presented as a choice
    - ✦ Should not be an either/or
  - Multi-method approaches provide the most accurate assessment
    - ✦ Provides multiple sources for your data, which strengthens your findings
  - Data to be collected will dictate method choice

# How: Quantitative Methods



- **When to choose:**
  - Interested in numbers and percentages
    - ✦ The what, but not the always the why
  - You want to generalize your results to a larger population
  - You have a large population of clients and you want to hear from as many as possible
- **Numerical information that can be counted, quantified, and mathematically analyzed**
- **Systematically collected, recorded, and analyzed**

# How: Quantitative Methods



- **Pre-existing Data Assessment**
  - Analyzing internal data (e.g. participant records, project logs) and/or external datasets (e.g. MARS, Census Bureau)
- **Pre- and Post-Test**
  - Measuring the level of change as the result of participating in an activity and/or project
- **Surveys**
  - Using a questionnaire tool with standardized questions to gather information

# How: Qualitative Methods



- Intent to gather an in-depth understanding of a project or process
  - Interested in meaning and description
    - ✦ Involves the why and the how
  - Allows a deeper look at issues of interest and to explore nuances
- Narrative information that describes context
- Systematically collected, recorded, and analyzed



# How: Qualitative Methods



- **Content Analysis**
  - Examining public and private documents and materials for themes and concepts
- **Participant Observation**
  - Observing behavior in a setting
- **Focus Groups**
  - Gathering a small group to discuss an issue using a moderator and a set of questions
- **Interviews**
  - Asking questions of another individual or several individuals in a one-on-one setting.



# **Concluding Today: Evaluation Tips**



# Evaluation Tips



- **Indicators and outcomes are expected and outlined as part of your funding**
  - **Refer to your Project Narrative** to determine what indicators and outcomes are of greatest priority
  - Ascertain what measures of effectiveness are used by other agencies (governmental, non-profit, etc.) and determine if it makes sense for the project to use the same or similar





# Evaluation Tips



- **Data Collection Tools:**
  - Utilize from the outset
    - If system is not developed early, more difficult to gather accurate data
  - Continue to revisit indicators and outcomes in Project Narrative
    - Ensure you are collecting what you want to know
  - Streamline your process as much as possible
    - Gather similar outputs and outcomes where possible
  - Use technology to the greatest extent possible
    - Excel spreadsheets, online data collection

# Evaluation Tips




- **On a regular basis:**
  - Revisit the stated activities, indicators, and outcomes to ensure they are focused, practical, and provide a current roadmap
  - Reviewing these items will ensure that the project and its evaluation, are proceeding as expected and desired



# Evaluation Tips



- **Not everything goes to plan:**
  - Be prepared to be flexible with choosing data collection methods
    - ✦ Data can be collected in multiple ways
  - Unintended outcomes are still outcomes



If the Goal of  
Evaluation  
is...

... to improve a program, project,  
or effort:

**Then an evaluation holds little  
worth unless findings are used**





Questions?

For additional assistance and queries:

<http://sites.psu.edu/amsta/contact-our-help-center/>

