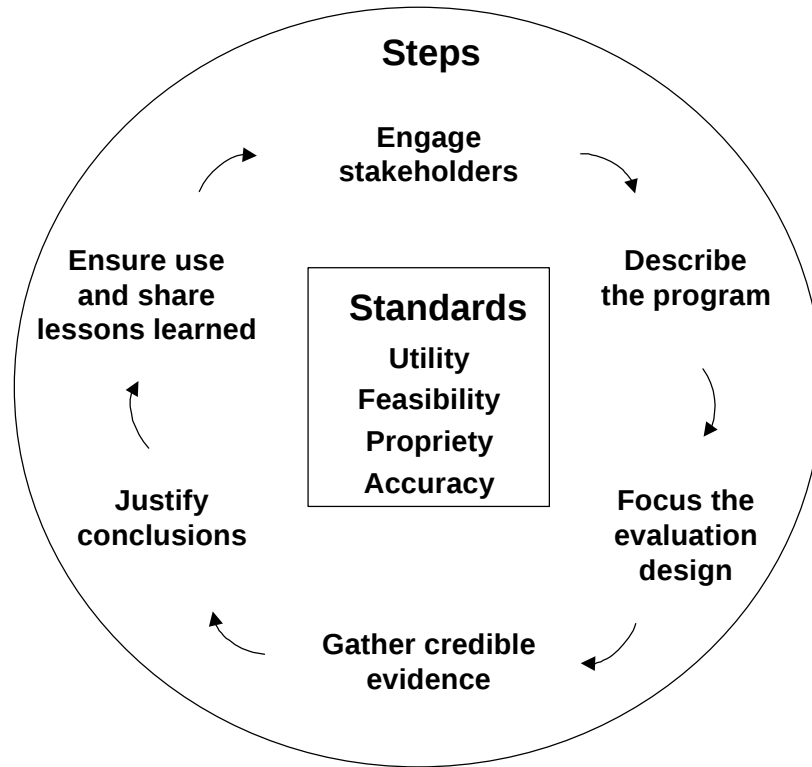


Overview of the Framework for Program Evaluation

ELEMENTS OF THE FRAMEWORK



REFERENCE CARD

Steps in Evaluation Practice	Standards for Effective Evaluation
• Engage stakeholders Those involved, those affected, primary intended users • Describe the program Need, expected effects, activities, resources, stage, context, logic model • Focus the evaluation design Purpose, users, uses, questions, methods, agreements • Gather credible evidence Indicators, sources, quality, quantity, logistics • Justify conclusions Standards, analysis/synthesis, interpretation, judgment, recommendations • Ensure use and share lessons learned Design, preparation, feedback, follow-up, dissemination	• Utility Serve the information needs of intended users • Feasibility Be realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal • Propriety Behave legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved and those affected • Accuracy Reveal and convey technically accurate information

OVERVIEW

Purpose

Effective program evaluation is a systematic way to improve and account for actions by involving procedures that are useful, feasible, ethical, and accurate. The framework is a practical, nonprescriptive tool, designed to summarize and organize essential elements of program evaluation. The framework comprises steps in program evaluation and standards for effective program evaluation. Adhering to these steps and standards will allow an understanding of each program's context and will improve how program evaluations are conceived and conducted. The specific purposes of the framework are to

- Summarize and organize the essential elements of program evaluation
- Provide a common frame of reference for conducting effective program evaluations
- Clarify steps in program evaluation
- Review standards for effective program evaluation; and
- Address misconceptions about the purposes and methods of program evaluation

Steps in Evaluation Practice

The framework emphasizes six connected steps that together can be a starting point to tailor an evaluation for a particular effort, at a particular point in time. Because the steps are all interdependent, they might be encountered in a nonlinear sequence; however, an order exists for fulfilling each -- earlier steps provide the foundation for subsequent progress. Thus, decisions regarding how to execute a step are iterative and should not be finalized until previous steps have been thoroughly addressed.

Standards for Effective Evaluation

A set of 30 standards -- organized into groups of utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy -- is also included. These standards help answer the question, "Will this evaluation be effective?" The standards are adopted from the Joint Committee on Educational Evaluation (1994); they are an approved standard by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and have been endorsed by the American Evaluation Association and 14 other professional organizations.

Applying the Framework

Professionals can no longer question whether to evaluate their programs; instead, the appropriate questions are, What is the best way to evaluate? What is being learned from evaluation? and How will lessons learned from evaluations be used to make program efforts more effective and accountable? The framework helps answer these questions by guiding its users in selecting evaluation strategies that are useful, feasible, ethical, and accurate. When applying the framework, the challenge is to devise an optimal -- as opposed to an ideal -- strategy. An optimal strategy is one that accomplishes each step in the framework in a way that accommodates the program context and meets or exceeds all relevant standards.

Integrating Evaluation in Routine Program Practice

Evaluation can be closely tied to routine practice when the emphasis is on practical, ongoing evaluation that involves all staff and stakeholders, not just evaluation experts. Informal evaluations are done routinely by individuals who ask questions and consider feedback as part of their daily professional responsibilities. Such informal evaluation processes are adequate when the stakes involved are low. When the stakes of a situation increase, however, then it becomes important to use evaluation procedures that are formal, visible, and justifiable.

ADDRESSING COMMON CONCERNS

Common concerns regarding program evaluation are clarified by using this framework. For instance, many evaluations are not undertaken because they are perceived as having to be costly. The expense of an evaluation, however, is relative; it depends upon the question being asked and the level of certainty desired for the answer. A simple, low-cost evaluation can deliver valuable results.

Rather than discounting evaluations as time-consuming and tangential to program operations, the framework encourages conducting evaluations that are timed strategically to provide necessary feedback. This makes it possible to integrate evaluation closely with program practice.

Another concern centers on the perceived technical demands of designing and conducting an evaluation. Although circumstances exist where controlled environments and elaborate analytic techniques are needed, most program evaluations do not require such methods. Instead, the practical approach endorsed by this framework focuses on questions that will improve the program by using context-sensitive methods and analytic techniques that summarize accurately the meaning of qualitative and quantitative information.

Finally, the prospect of evaluation can trouble many program staff because they perceive evaluation methods as punitive, exclusionary, and adversarial. The framework instead encourages an evaluation approach that is designed to be helpful and engages all interested stakeholders in a process that welcomes their participation.

The following table summarizes assumptions that can be re-framed to fit a more practical framework.

<u>Evaluation Is Thought To Be:</u>	<u>Evaluation Can Be:</u>
Expensive	Cost-effective
Time-consuming	Strategically timed
Tangential	Integrated
Technical	Accurate
Not Inclusive	Engaging
Academic	Practical
Punitive	Helpful
Political	Participatory
Useless	Useful

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

CDC Evaluation Working Group
<http://www.cdc.gov/eval>