1. Evaluation: What is it and Why is it important?

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation has multiple purposes and meanings. In this section, we define what constitutes an evaluation and explain the various purposes for evaluation. In addition, we discuss the role that evaluation plays in relation to program planning and implementation and how evaluations can be made as useful as possible.

WHAT IS EVALUATION?

Evaluation: 1: act of ascertaining or fixing the value or worth of; 2: an appraisal of the value of something. (Source: *American Heritage Dictionary*)

Program Evaluation: the use of social science research procedures to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs that is adapted to their political and organizational environments and designed to inform social action in ways that improve social conditions. (Source: Mark Lipsey, "The Basics of Program Evaluation.")

WHY EVALUATE?

VALUE IN THE NONPROFIT AND PHILANTHROPIC MARKETPLACE IS DEFINED BY MEASURABLE SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND/OR ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT.

In the for-profit sector, "market" indicators—how much people are willing to pay for a product, how much of the product people purchase—define the value of a given enterprise. A business is motivated to build a strong organizational infrastructure to the extent that the health of the infrastructure contributes to the ultimate quality of the product, as measured by market indicators.

In the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors, the funders who support organizations, programs and services—either public or philanthropic—have historically defined the value of those organizations, programs and services. The value has *not* been defined by the consumers—or clients—of those services. However, as a result of the changing landscape and changing expectations of the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors, it is becoming increasingly harder for nonprofits and foundations to simply assert the value of their work in the absence of evidence. They now are asked to demonstrate value through measurable impact. **Evaluation is one important tool for organizations to measure and demonstrate their impact**.

1. Evaluation: What is it and Why is it important?

At the same time, **evaluation is an integral part of good organizational and management practice** for organizations in all sectors. Nonprofits and foundations are increasingly turning towards evaluation not only to satisfy external expectations but also to drive internal improvements. As Hodding Carter II, president and CEO of the John S. and James L Knight Foundation said, "Foundations need to do a better job of understanding their work—the failures as well as successes. Our job is to support the best work of this republic, and that is too important to be left to chance." Evaluation is one of the primary ways that funders can get the information needed to drive improvements and increase their effectiveness.

ULTIMATELY, EVALUATION AND THE APPROPRIATE APPLICATION OF INFORMATION ARE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS.

1. Evaluation: What is it and Why is it important?

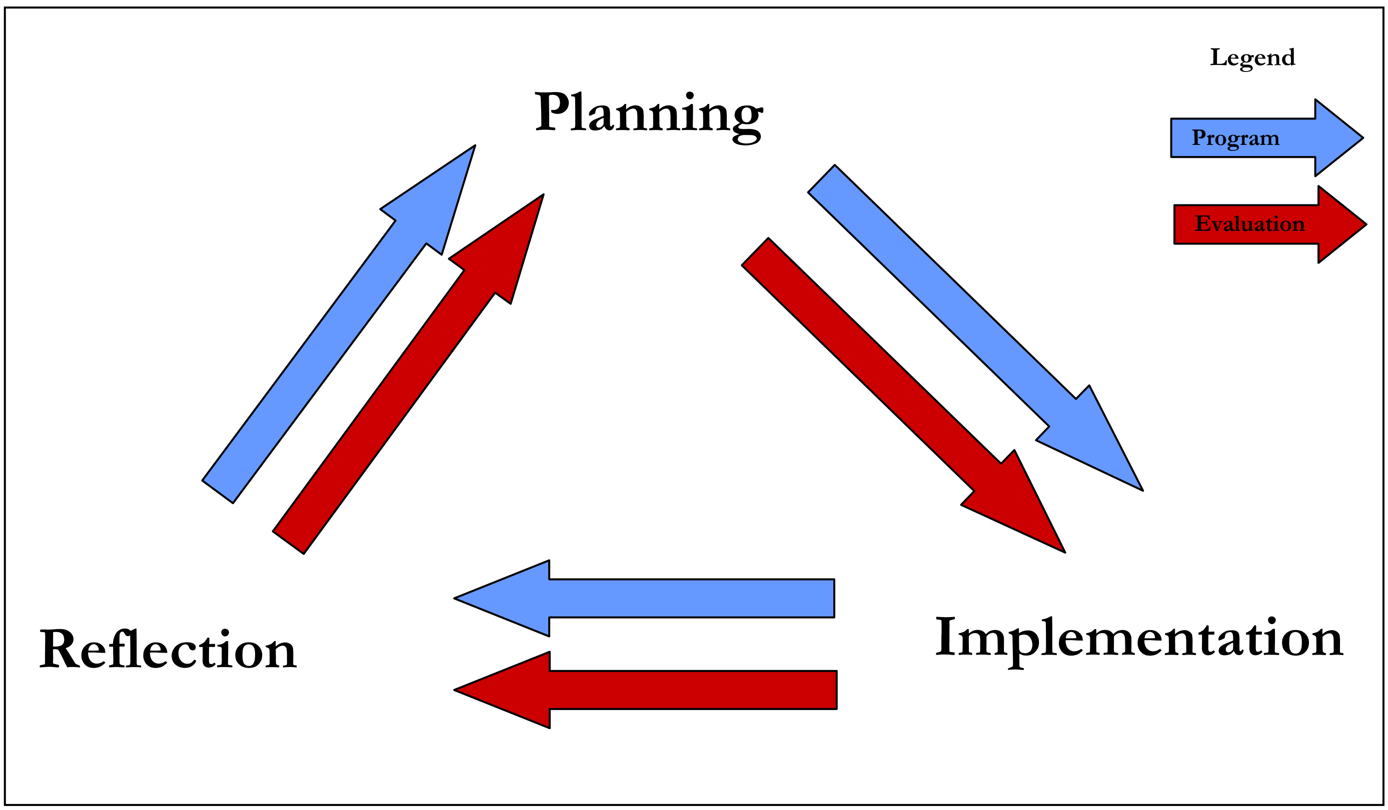
THE TWO PRIMARY PURPOSES OF EVALUATION

To "Prove"	To "Improve"
✓ Demonstrate effectiveness ✓ Demonstrate "social return on investment"	✓ Inform practice ✓ Improve program planning and design ✓ Better manage programs and services

Other Motivations and Purposes of Evaluation

- ✓ To inform the field/create knowledge
- ✓ To raise public awareness of the issues you are addressing
- ✓ To meet funding requirements/accountability

Evaluation is ideally an integral part of program planning and implementation. In the graphic below, evaluation is most effectively employed in conjunction and simultaneously with program planning and implementation. Not only should evaluation results be used to inform further program planning and implementation, but also when designing and planning for programs, establishing objectives and deciding how achievement of those objectives will be evaluated leads to more effective evaluations.



1. Evaluation: What is it and Why is it important?

MAKING EVALUATION USEFUL

Evaluations are only as useful as they used to inform decision making. In order to facilitate and ensure use, clarify early on who the intended users of the evaluation are and what the intended use is. Illustrative questions to elicit intended use are:

- ✓ What decisions, if any, are the findings expected to affect?
- ✓ When will decisions be made? By whom? When, then must the evaluation findings be presented to be timely and influential?
- ✓ What is at stake in the decisions? For whom? What controversies or issues surround the decisions?
- ✓ What other factors will affect the decision making?
- ✓ How much influence do you expect the evaluation to have—*realistically*?
- ✓ To what extent has the outcome of the decisions already been determined?
- ✓ What data and findings are needed to support decision making?
- ✓ How will we know afterward if the evaluation was used as intended?

Source: Michael Quinn Patton. Utilization-Focused Evaluation: The New Century Text. Third edition. Thousand, Oaks: Sage, 1997.

MORE SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE EVALUATIONS

Evaluation Process

- Be inclusive of key stakeholders in the process of designing and implementing the evaluation and analyzing results
- Be mindful of the burden placed on evaluation participants/grantees
- Acknowledge the organization's current capacity

Analysis

- Make it timely.
- Make it easy to understand and compelling.
- Make your audiences active rather than passive recipients of information. Ask staff and board members to project the results of the information gathering that has taken place before sharing the actual findings. This provides people with an opportunity to test their own assumptions; it is an effective tool for engaging people in active reflection.
- Be inclusive in the process of interpreting the results. Ask program staff, in particular program managers, to help find the meaning and explain the results.

2. Evaluation Types and Approaches

INTRODUCTION

There are many different types of evaluation and approaches to evaluation. How one chooses an approach will depend on factors such as the purpose(s) of the evaluation and resources available. In this section, we outline the primary approaches to evaluation, the questions that each approach is best suited to answer, and key issues regarding each evaluation approach.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT CHOICE OF EVALUATION APPROACH

1. The purpose of the evaluation and its intended uses

Purpose of the evaluation	Relevant Evaluation Types and Approaches
To Improve	⇨ Process Evaluation ⇨ Formative Evaluation ⇨ Performance Measurement Systems and Benchmarking
To Prove	⇨ Outcome/Impact Evaluation ⇨ Summative Evaluation ⇨ Experimental/Quasi-experimental Designs

2. The resources available for the evaluation (e.g., funds, time, staff, expertise, cooperation, access, available program resources (including data)

   Evaluations cost money. As a tool for organizational effectiveness, its cost must be weighed against the benefits of using the funds for other purposes. Organizations should be realistic about the resources available for the evaluation (not just money, also staff time and expertise) and adjust the purposes and design of the evaluation accordingly.

There is a direct relationship between cost and certainty

3. The nature of the program and program circumstances (e.g., the purpose of the program, its structure, age, scope, etc). For example:

   - **Stage in program/organizational lifecycle**: Those in the mature stages are more ready for measurement of outcomes. Those still in earlier stages of planning and implementation will more likely be

   - **"Logic Model Risk"**: The more proven the organization's model is, the more reliable the theory of change will be, thus shifting the focus of the evaluation to implementation and other issues.

2. Evaluation Types and Approaches

TYPES OF EVALUATION

Process Evaluation

- The story of a program or initiative.
- Answers the question: What happened?

Outcome Evaluation

- Describes the consequence of a program.
- Answers the question: What changed among a target population?

Impact Evaluation

- Describes the long-term, community-level change.
- Answers the question: What changed on a broader population or community level?

Formative Evaluation

- Informs the development of a program or initiative in order to make ongoing refinements.
- Answers the question: What is and is not working?

Summative Evaluation

- Provides a judgment about a program's success or merit at the end of the program or initiative.
- Answers the question: What did or did not work?

Research Designs

Non-Experimental Design

- Involves the use of a "within group" comparison (e.g., pre- to post-intervention among members of the "treatment" group) to assess change over time.
- Answers the question: How are people who received this intervention different at the end of the intervention?

Quasi-Experimental and Experimental Designs

- Involve the use of a comparison (quasi-experimental) or control (experimental) group in order to support claims of causality.
- Answers the question: Can this intervention or initiative be directly linked to the demonstrated changes?

2. Evaluation Types and Approaches

Other Frequently Mentioned Approaches

Performance Measurement Systems/Results Based Accountability

- Involves the use of benchmarking in order to monitor and track progress towards objectives.
- Answers the question: How well is the program working? What are the areas for concern?

Theory Driven Evaluation

- Involves explication of how the theory of how the program is expected to create impact and structures the evaluation around the theory.
- Answers the question: Is the program creating the intended effect according to its theory of change?
- Raises the issue of theory failure versus implementation failure.

Mixed-Methods Evaluation

- Use of quantitative and qualitative methods in order to "triangulate" findings.
- Answers the question: Is there consistency in results across perspectives and data sources about what happened and why?

2. Evaluation Types and Approaches

More on Process/Implementation/Formative Evaluations*

Evaluation questions that motivate process/implementation evaluations:

- ✓ Are the intended services being delivered to the intended persons?
- ✓ Are the administrative and service objectives being met?
- ✓ Are clients satisfied with the services?
- ✓ Are administrative, organizational, and personnel functions handled well?
- ✓ What is the quality of the service provided?

Applicable Methods

- ***General approaches***
  - Process evaluation or implementation assessment
  - Program monitoring; management information systems
  - Performance measurement & monitoring
- ***Typical data sources***
  - Surveys, interviews
  - Observation
  - Program documents (grants, contracts, personnel)
  - Service/client records

Some Key Issues

- Theory failure vs. Implementation failure (e.g. DARE)
- Implementation assessment as a precondition to impact evaluation
- One-shot assessment versus ongoing assessment

More on Outcome/Impact Evaluations*

Evaluation questions that motivate outcome/impact evaluations:

- ✓ Are the outcome goals and objectives being achieved?
- ✓ Do the services have beneficial effects on the recipients?
- ✓ Is the problem or situation the services are intended to address made better?

Applicable Methods

- Randomized experiments
- Group comparisons quasi-experiments
- Pre-post quasi-experiments

Some Key Issues

- Outputs versus outcomes versus impacts
- Attribution of outcomes
- Disaggregation of outcomes
- Time horizon of outcomes

*Source: Mark Lipsey, *The Basics of Program Evaluation*.

3. Evaluation Methods and Tools

INTRODUCTION

In this section, we discuss the primary research methods used in evaluation: surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Different methods have different strengths and limitations. Which methods one chooses will depend on the purpose(s) of the evaluation and the resources available. Evaluation methods fall into two primary categories: quantitative and qualitative methods. We also introduce useful tools for evaluation and planning: setting goals and objectives and developing logic models and theories of change.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

What is it?

Quantitative data is information that can be counted mathematically. It is gathered usually by surveys, and elicits data in a form that permits exact counting. Quantitative data uses percentages, averages, and other mathematical operations as a way of summarizing how a population thinks, feels, or acts. Quantitative data collection is typically gathered from large numbers of respondents either selected by a random method, or through a convenience selection process. Because it is largely numbers, data are analyzed by the use of statistical methods. Quantitative data answer what, when and who questions well, but are limited in their ability to answer the why and how questions.

Strengths

- Quantitative data can be very consistent, precise and reliable.
- Surveys have advantages in terms of economy and the numbers of people you can reach.
- If the informant selection process is well-designed and the sample is representative of the population being studied, the responses can be generalized.
- Relatively easy to analyze, and data are flexible enough to allow an array of analytical methods to be used to extract inferences.

Limitations

- Surveys have the weakness of being somewhat narrow and superficial for complex matters.
- It is difficult to gain a full sense of the context in which the activities take place.
- Access to and reliability of secondary data can be problematic.
- Some secondary data may not be related to your research question.

3. Evaluation Methods and Tools

Primary Quantitative Methods

Surveys

- Surveys are the most commonly used method to gather primary quantitative data.
- Survey research is the use of a questionnaire given to a sample of respondents selected from some population of interest. This method of collecting data is typically used with a population too large to observe directly and individually.
- Surveys are usually presented in a form that may be self-administered or administered by another person either directly or over the telephone.
- The essential characteristic of a survey administrator is that they be neutral; their presence must have little or no effect on the responses given.
- The advantages of self-administered questionnaires are the economy, speed, lack of interviewer bias, and possibility of anonymity and privacy to encourage more candid responses on sensitive issues.
- The advantages of an interviewer-driven survey are fewer incomplete questionnaires, fewer misunderstood questions, higher return rate, and the opportunity for observation.

Helpful Survey Development Tips

- Surveys should use primarily closed-ended questions.
- Response categories should be mutually exclusive.
- For continuous variables (e.g. age, income), leave response category open-ended.
- Avoid asking two questions in one—don't use "and" or "or" in your questions.
- Provide clear instructions.
- Use appropriate language and cultural references.
- Make sure you ask questions your respondents can answer.
- Always provide an "other", "don't know" or "not applicable" response category.
- Make it user-friendly and leave plenty of white space between questions.
- Colored paper increases response rate.
- Consider providing incentives as a way of encouraging participation.
- If you conduct a mail survey, remember to provide return postage.
- Always pilot-test any survey you develop.

3. Evaluation Methods and Tools

Quantitative Secondary Data

Secondary data are commonly used in program evaluation. The following are just some of the types of secondary data typically available.

- Census Data
- Knowledge, Attitude, Belief, and Behavior (KABB) Studies
- Other Program Evaluations
- Non-confidential Client Information
- Agency Progress Reports
- Academic Journals
- Criminal Justice Statistics
- School Performance Data

QUALITATIVE DATA

What is it?

Qualitative data is information that is gathered, usually by observations, interviews, or focus groups that concentrates on some aspect of participants' experiences. There is less emphasis on *counting* the numbers of people who think or behave in certain ways, and more emphasis on *explaining* why people think and behave in certain ways. It involves smaller numbers of respondents and utilizes open-ended questionnaires or protocols. Qualitative data is very good at answering the how and why questions verses what, when and who questions.

Strengths

- Useful for refining and improving quantitative information because it allows more in-depth data gathering.

- In focus groups, questions are directed at the group and not specific individuals; therefore, highly sensitive subjects can be explored without the individual feeling pressured to respond or disclose.

Limitations

- Qualitative data collection is time consuming and resource intensive.

- Results may not by fully generalizable to the entire study population or community because the group is not a representative sub-sample in a strict or formal sense.

- Data can be more difficult to analyze into concise and consistent categories.

3. Evaluation Methods and Tools

How do you get it?

Observation:

- Involves looking at what is happening as a way of answering questions rather than asking those questions directly.
- Observation is used to better understand behaviors, the social context in which they arise, and the meanings that individuals attach to them.
- Observers compile field notes describing what they observe based on a set of questions that describe what they should be looking for. Analysis focuses on what happened and why.
- May be the most feasible way to collect information from certain populations (e.g. children or infants).

One-on-One (in-depth) interviews:

- Provides an opportunity to elicit detailed information from individuals about their experiences, behaviors and opinions.
- An alternative to focus group interviews when you want to avoid group influences on the responses people give.
- Questions are mostly open-ended; if closed-ended questions are used, they usually are related to an open-ended question.

Focus Groups:

- Typically composed of eight to twelve key informants selected through non-random means who are brought together with a facilitator to respond to questions relevant to the research questions.
- Role of the facilitator is to stimulate conversation among the group.
- Useful for generating ideas and suggesting strategies, though not very useful for finalizing choices and definitively settling issues.
- Group members must have some relevant common experience, and ideally, should not know each other.
- Questions or topics are open-ended and broader than question used in one-one interviews and are designed to stimulate discussion among focus group participants.

3. Evaluation Methods and Tools

Developing a Protocol to Collect Qualitative Data

All of these methods for collecting qualitative data include the use of a protocol with pre-determined questions and topics. A protocol provides consistency in the areas of inquiry and allows for the development and analysis of findings across respondents and groups.

- Develop a full list of questions that you would like answered that respond directly to your programmatic objectives and evaluation plan.
- Organize these questions into a set of summary topics. Focus group protocols should have between 4 to 8 broad questions. One-on-one interview protocols can vary in length depending on the amount of time you will be able to spend with each respondent. Each protocol should include probes with each question that can guide the interviewer or facilitator to get specific examples or deeper responses.
- Questioning should begin with the broadest, least sensitive topics and move into specific or more sensitive areas as the interview or focus group progresses. Protocols should flow logically between topics.
- Check to make sure that these questions or topics are related to your original research question.
- Always pilot-test any protocols you develop in order to make sure that the questions are understandable and elicit the types of responses and information that you require.

3. Evaluation Methods and Tools

OBJECTIVES:
THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF PROGRAMS AND EVALUATIONS

It is important to know what it is your organization is trying to accomplish in order to assess your efforts. Statements of objectives serve as a road map for guiding the development and implementation of programs and services. They also provide the foundation for the evaluation. They are the criteria against which success is measured.

Whereas goals are broad statements of intent that describes the work of programs or initiatives, objectives are measurable milestones towards the accomplishments of goals that are time-limited, specific and measurable.

There are two types of objectives commonly developed for programs and evaluations:

Process objectives describe specific activities that are ***performed***, by whom they are performed and in what time period.

Outcome objectives describe what is anticipated to ***change*** as a result of these activities.

How to Create Useful Objectives

Objectives should be **S-M-A-R-T** in order to be helpful.

- **S**pecific
- **M**easurable
- **A**ttainable
- **R**ealistic
- **T**ime-limited

WORKSHEET FOR PREPARING
PROCESS OBJECTIVES

Formula #1:

The first example focuses on the clients/consumer (i.e., those participating in or benefiting from the programs and services) and describes what those clients/customers will either get or do in a specific period.

By ______________, ___________________ of __________ will _______________________.
(specific date) (specific number) (who) (get or do something)

> **Example:**
> By December 31st, 100 young people between the ages of 12 and 16 will participate in a conflict resolution training.

Formula #2:

The second example focuses on the program and describes what it will do in order to advance its goals, within a specific time period.

By ______________, ___________ will ____________________.
(specific date) (who/what) (do something)

> **Example:**
> By September, the conflict resolution workshop leaders will make at least 10 presentations to parent/teacher associations throughout the school district.

3. Evaluation Methods and Tools

**WORKSHEET FOR PREPARING
OUTCOME OBJECTIVES**

Formula #1:

The first example focuses on how clients/consumers will change as a result of exposure to or involvement in programs or services.

By ____________________, _____ of ___________ will ____________.
(specific time frame) (%) (who) (change)

Example:
Within three months of the conflict resolution training, 75% of the participants will have increased their communication and problem-solving skills.

Formula #2:

The second example focuses on the change that occurs beyond the individuals who are the direct clients or consumers of programs and services.

By ____________________, ___________ will _______________________________.
(specific time frame) (what) (change) (by how much)

Example:
By the end of the school year, the number of reported incidents of violence within participating schools will be reduced by 25%.

3. Evaluation Methods and Tools

APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK TO ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS:
A Case in Crafting Process and Outcome Objectives for Leadership and Governance.

The following provides a scenario of a nonprofit organization undertaking a project related to leadership and governance, with the overarching goal of enhancing organizational effectiveness.

Scenario

A nonprofit organization that has experienced significant growth in recent years wants to reinvigorate its Board of Directors. Many of the people on the Board have been there for a while. In general, they have not provided much vision or policy guidance to the organization for many years. Attendance at Board meetings has fallen off and important Board committees such as the Finance Committee no longer function consistently or effectively. The Executive Director and a handful of key board members think that the organization is at a point where it needs a plan to be more strategic about its future and about managing growth. They feel it is time for the Board to diversify in skills and expertise, to be more active, more visionary and more supportive to the organization.

Developing Objectives

The following process and outcome objectives represent what is expected to happen (process) and change (outcome) assuming a start date of activities as January 2006.

Process Objectives

1. By June 2006, the Executive Director, Board President and Vice President will strategically recruit 6 new board members.

2. By July 2006, the Executive Director and the full Board will convene a full day professionally facilitated retreat to plan for the future.

3. By August 2006, the Board will have reactivated the Finance Committee.

4. By December 2006, the Finance Committee will have defined its roles and responsibilities and created measurable objectives for itself.

5. By September 2006, the Board will create a new Committee called the Building Committee.

6. By December 2006, the Building Committee will commission a feasibility study on new facility development for the organization.

3. Evaluation Methods and Tools

Outcome Objectives

1. By June 2006, 25% of the Board members will be newcomers to the organization.

2. 100% of the new members joining the Board in 2006 will bring new and needed skills and expertise in the areas on finance, planning, real estate and/or facility design.

3. By June 2006, the Executive Director will have doubled the amount of time spent on Board-related issues—from 10% to 20% of her time.

4. Between June and December 2006, the Executive Director will continue to maintain a high level of involvement with the Board, at a rate of 20-25% of her total work time.

5. By December 2006, 80% of the board members will have increased their participation in Board activities.

6. By January 2007, 80% of the Board members will report increased meaning associated with their Board involvement.

3. Evaluation Methods and Tools

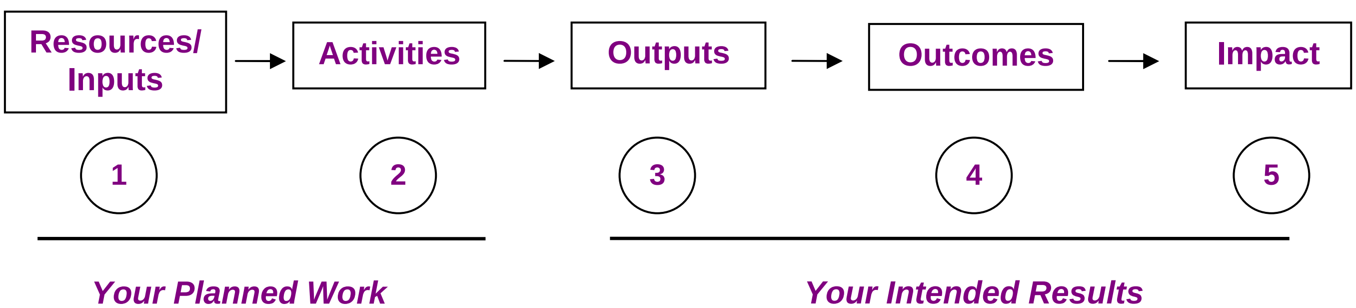
LOGIC MODELS AND THEORIES OF CHANGE

Logic models and theories of change are also tools that inform both program planning/design as well as evaluation of the program. There is a fair amount of confusion about the difference between a logic model and a theory of change and when each is most appropriate.

Logic Models

"Basically a **logic model** is a systematic and visual way to present and share your understanding of the relationships among the resources you have to operate your program, the activities you plan to do, and the changes or results you hope to achieve." (from W.K. Kellogg Foundation's *Logic Model Development Guide*.)

Logic models tend to apply to a single program and are used in evaluations of programs.



Theories of Change

"A **theory of change** is a systematic assessment of what needs to happen in order for a desired outcome to occur. Theories of change should be designed to explain how and why change happens as well as the potential role of an organization's work in contributing to its visions of progress." (from G.E.O.'s *Evaluation as a Pathway to Learning*)

Theories of change usually depict the work of several programs or an overall agency and are used in evaluations of clusters of programs or overall agency impact.

Components of theories of change can include:

- Contextual Factors
- Issues Addressed
- Purpose and Principles
- Assumptions and Beliefs
- Values
- Preconditions
- Strategies
- Expected Change

4. Helpful Resources

RESOURCES ON EVALUATION

The American Evaluation Association
The primary professional association for evaluators. The website provides information on publications (such as the two major evaluation journals, *New Directions in Evaluation* and *The American Journal of Evaluation*), trainings, programs, and other online resources.
http://www.eval.org/

Building Evaluation Capacity by Hallie Preskill and Darlene Russ-EFT
This book provides overview of the practice of evaluation and provides activities for learning how to design and conduct evaluation studies.

The Evaluation Center
This website provides checklists of good practices for evaluation management, evaluation models, evaluation values and criteria, meta-evaluation, and other evaluation related topics.
http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/

The Evaluator's Institute
This organization offers short-term professional development courses in a range of evaluation topics.
http://www.evaluatorsinstitute.com/

Funders Guide to Evaluation by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations
This book provides an overview on how evaluation can be a powerful tool for improving funder effectiveness and provides practical tools for how foundations can develop evaluation in their own work and with their grantees. It also includes a self-assessment tool that organizations can use to measure their readiness for evaluation.

***Logic Model Development Guide* by W.K. Kellogg Foundation**
This packet provides background and tips on creating and using logic models.
http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub3669.pdf

Theory of Change by ActKnowledge and Aspen Roundtable
This website provides background about theories of change and technical assistance and training on creating theories of change.
http://www.theoryofchange.org/index.html