A Primer on Evaluation

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Overview

• Defining Evaluation
• Formal vs. Informal Evaluation
• Programs, Policies, Products
• Evaluation vs. Research
• Reasons for Conducting an Evaluation
• Areas of Evaluation
• Formative vs. Summative Evaluation
• Popular Evaluation Models
• Design, Data Collection and Analyses
• Politics of Evaluation
• Limitations of Evaluation
Evaluation Defined

• There is not a universally agreed upon definition…
  – terms merit/quality and worth/value are universal

• …to determine or fix the value of; to examine and judge.
• …the systematic determination of the value or quality of something (Scriven, 1973).
• …the identification, clarification, and application of defensible criteria to determine an evaluation object’s value in relation to those criteria.

• Often considered a dynamic process…
Encyclopedia of Evaluation

• Defines as:
  – …an applied inquiry process for collecting and synthesizing evidence that culminates in conclusions about the state of affairs, *value*, merit, worth, significance, or quality of a program, product, person, policy, proposal, or plan. Conclusions made in evaluations encompass both an empirical aspect (that something is the case) and a normative aspect (judgment about the *value* of something). It is the *value* feature that distinguishes evaluation from other types of inquiry, such as basic science research, clinical epidemiology, investigative journalism, or public polling. (Fournier 2005a: 140)
Formal vs. Informal Evaluation

• Formal Evaluation
  – Thorough, structured, systematic procedure in making judgements
  – Critical intelligence

• Informal Evaluation
  – Systematic process is absent
  – Basic form of human behavior occurring on a daily basis
    • You judged the usefulness of this presentation prior to attending
What is Evaluated?

• Programs
  – After school programming (ASP), Head Start, Teacher Training

• Policies
  – Health Care Reform, NCLB, Concealed Firearms in the Classroom

• Products
  – Textbook, curricula, student work

• Other
  – Personnel
  – Processes
  – Proposals
Identifying Stakeholders

• Stakeholders are those with a vested interest in the evaluation
  – Upstream Impactees
    • Taxpayers, political supporters, funders, policy makers
  – Midstream Impactees (Primary Stakeholders)
    • Program Managers, Staff, Teachers, Administrators
  – Downstream Impactees
    • Those receiving services or products

• Important role for evaluator to help stakeholders articulate their criteria
What is Evaluation?

• Primary purpose is to help stakeholders make a judgement and/or decision on what is being evaluated
  – Generalizability to other settings not necessarily important
  – Lead to judgements
    • e.g., This particular after school program is valuable.

• Evaluator helps set the agenda
  – Various stakeholders are decision makers

• Intended to have a relatively immediate impact

• Judging Adequacy
  – accuracy/utility/feasibility/propriety

• Evaluators broadly trained
  – Transdisciplinary
What is Research?

- Primary purpose is to add to knowledge in a field
  - Intended to advance knowledge
  - Seeks conclusions
    - After school programs with component X are effective
- Researcher sets the agenda
- Maximize generalizability to many settings
- Results may or may not be used immediately
- Judging Adequacy
  - Internal/External Validity
- Researchers narrowly focused in a specific area
Reasons to Conduct an Evaluation

• Traditionally…
  – to determine the worth or merit of whatever is evaluated.

• More recently…
  – To inform decision making
    • Public policy, education, etc…

• Improve Programs

• Bring about social betterment
  – …alleviate social problems and meet human needs…

• Contribute to extending knowledge
## Formative vs. Summative Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formative</th>
<th>Summative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary purpose is improvement</td>
<td>Primary purpose is accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used by primary stakeholders</td>
<td>Used by upstream stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of what is occurring</td>
<td>Summary of what has occurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions as a result of recommendations based on what is occurring</td>
<td>Decisions as a result of what has been completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Chef tastes the soup”</td>
<td>“Customer tastes the soup”</td>
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</tbody>
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General Areas of Evaluation

• Context/Needs Assessment
• Theory Assessment
• Process
• Impact
  – Product/Outcomes
• Cost/Benefit

• A single evaluation could contain all or one of these areas!
Context/Needs Assessment

• What is the need…
  – Does a program need to be developed?
  – Is it necessary to continue a program?

• What are the contextual conditions surrounding the program?
  – Social
  – Political

• Fill gaps between present and desired state of affairs
  – What type or changes are necessary in ASP?
    • Academic/Social behavioral components
    • Parental Involvement
Theory Assessment

• Conceptualization/Design of what is being evaluated
• As an evaluator, should gain an understanding of why the program is designed the way it is
  – Sound conceptualization/logic
  – Fit ‘best practices’ and theory (social science theory)

• Is the design of the ASP consistent with theory about what works in ASP’s?
Process Assessment

• Proper implementation of program
  – Process evaluation at a single point in time
  – Program implementation if tracked across points in time
    • Implementation or theory failure?
  – Is implementation ethical?
    • Legal statutes or standards guiding implementation?

• Do implementation records match standards for implementing ASPs?
  – Hours students are provided academic support?
  – Hours staff are working?
Impact Assessment

• What is the impact of the program?
  – Were desired outcomes achieved?
  – Does the program change what would have occurred without the program?

• Design an issue here
  – Experimental/quasi-experimental designs
  – Pre-post test designs

• Does the ASP impact student achievement in classroom? Behavior?
  – Homework completion?
  – Grades?
  – Classroom behavior?
Benefit/Cost Assessment

• What is the ‘bang for the buck’?
  – How does that compare to other, similar programs?
  – How do benefits compare to costs?
    • What if costs outweigh benefits?
Popular Evaluation Models

- Goals Oriented Evaluation
  - Goal Free Evaluation
- CIPP Model of Evaluation (Stufflebeam, 1971)
- Utilization Focused Evaluation (Patton, 2004)
Goals Oriented Evaluation Model

• Specific objectives identified
  – Evaluation designed around these objectives

• Goal free evaluation does not identify specific objectives
  – Evaluation is a ‘learned’ process
    • Evaluator learns about program and results inductively…not aware of specific objectives

• Goal free often supplements goal oriented evaluation
  – Separate evaluator collecting data to supplement goal-oriented data
CIPP Model of Evaluation

- **Context**
  - What needs to be done?
- **Input**
  - How should it be done?
- **Process**
  - Is it being done?
- **Product**
  - Did it succeed?

- **CIPP checklist exists**
  - Evaluator/Client/Stakeholder activities
  - Evaluation Center Resources
    - [http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/](http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/)
CIPP Model in Use

• 21st Century Community Learning Centers program
  – Context
    • ASP integrated with day program
    • Promote student achievement/increase protective factors for at risk students
    • Structured interviews collected provided formative data
  – Input
    • Primary stakeholders complete surveys
      – Satisfaction/level of involvement
  – Process
    • Documentation of attendance/activity patterns of all involved
  – Product
    • Data collected on academic performance, behavioral outcomes, reduction of risk factors
Utilization Focused Evaluation

• Provide information to primary intended users
• Facilitate use as much as possible
• “Focus on intended use by intended users”
• Insure needs of primary intended users are met
• Focus on stakeholders’ key questions, issues and intended uses
• Involving intended users in the interpretation of findings
• Judge evaluations by their intended utility and actual use
Data Gathering in Evaluation

- Focus Groups
- Questionnaires/Surveys
- Direct Observation
- Participant Observation
- Interviews
Data Analyses in Evaluation

• Qualitative
• Quantitative
• Mixed Methods

• Finding a balance between the two…
Politics of Evaluation

- Sometimes stakeholder interests limit what can/can’t be said about evaluation
  - Information in the wrong hands can be detrimental to a program
- Stakeholder agenda should not create desired results
Limitations of Evaluation

• Political
• Inaccurate view of the evaluation
  – A systematic process rather than a series of discrete studies
• Characteristics of what is being evaluated
  – Context of the evaluation
• Fiscal limitations
• Evaluator competencies
• Timeframe
• Limitations of measurement instruments
References

Thank You!