

Useful Evaluation Terms

Assessment - is a synonym for evaluation, but often used to refer to a technique (e.g., practical assessment) or a mini-study.

Benchmarks - performance data used for comparison purposes. They can be identified from your program's own prior data or relative to performance in the field.

Compliance/Monitoring - type of evaluation where evaluation questions are focused on adherence to pre-specified procedures.

Comparison Groups are non-participants who are identified as a reference for comparison (e.g., individuals at different sites).

Control Groups - are non-participants who are usually identified in the use of an experimental design, ideally on an over-subscribed program (i.e., where there are more participants than slots). The treatment or experimental group actually participates in the program and the control group, although eligible and similar, does not receive or participate in the program. Results of treatment and control group outcomes are then compared to determine program contribution to outcomes.

******* WARNING -- Comparisons must be conducted very carefully.**

Extrapolation - modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical conditions. Extrapolations are logical, thoughtful, and problem-oriented rather than purely empirical, statistical and probabilistic.

Formative Evaluations - focus on ways of improving and enhancing programs, and are conducted in the early or ongoing stages of a program.

Generalize - to assign qualities based upon group membership, or to make inferences about groups or programs based on the outcomes of a sample or subset of members.

Goals - are conditions (usually broad) that programs are working toward (e.g., to promote well-being).

Indicators - observable, measurable characteristics of changes that represent elements of an outcome (e.g., normal birth weight is an indicator of a healthy baby outcome).

Needs Assessments - determine whether existing services are meeting needs, where there are gaps in services and where there are available resources. These are often conducted prior to initiation of an evaluation or in response to evaluation findings.

Objectives - something that is worked for or strived for, which can be observed or measured.

Outcomes - results for participants, during and/or after participation in a program

Outputs - products of a program's activity (e.g., # of sessions held, # of participants served).

Qualitative Data - consist of detailed description of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors; direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs and thoughts; and excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records and case histories. Qualitative data collection methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail and typically produce a wealth of detailed data about a much smaller number of people and cases.

Quantitative Data - come from questionnaires, tests, standardized observation instruments, and program records. Quantitative data collection methods permit the complexities of the world to be broken into parts and assigned numerical values. To obtain quantitative data it is necessary to be able to categorize the object of interest in ways that permit counting.

Random Assignment - a technique which allows program providers to randomly divide participants into treatment (those who get services) and control groups (those who don't).

Reliable Measures - those which can be repeated under similar conditions.

Research - in social science is also a systematic collection of information, but it is undertaken to discover new knowledge, test theories, establish universal truths and generalize across time and space.

Summative Evaluations - are aimed at determining the essential effectiveness of a program. They are especially important in making decisions about terminating, maintaining or extending a program.

Triangulation - multiple streams of information obtained by either collecting different kinds of data about the same subject, using different workers to complete the same tasks; using multiple methods to obtain data; using multiple perspectives to analyze information.

Valid Measures - those which accurately measure what they are intended to measure. (Warning, this is difficult to test. For most social and behavioral variables, no agreed upon testing standards exist).