

Evaluators work with organizations to find out if their work is making a positive difference

WHAT IS EVALUATION?

All around the world, individuals and organizations work hard to achieve positive change. Some work to improve literacy, while others might hope to improve well-being or help communities recover from disaster.

Evaluators partner with these organizations to find out if their work is making a positive difference. We use a range of systematic methods—such as experiments, surveys, or observations—to generate the evidence that informs these discussions.

Evaluators also work with their partners to find out how to maximize their impact, asking questions like *What works? For whom? Under what circumstances?*

Our goal is to help organizations learn, improve, and—ultimately—do as much good as possible.

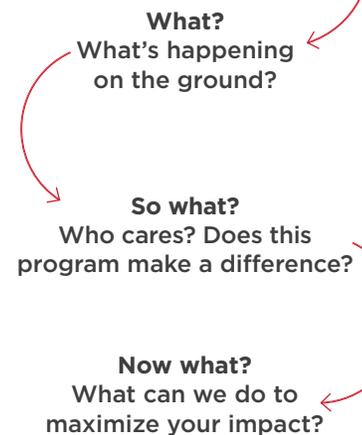
WHY EVALUATE?

We understand that researchers, government agencies, foundations, and non-profits have limited funds. But, allocating some of those funds to evaluation brings benefits that are worth the investment.

Here's a few reasons why.

#1 Maximizing impact 	Evaluation helps maximize your impact. Research shows that when organizations engage in evaluation activities, their work is more likely to be sustainable. And: when organizations use evaluation information to adapt their programs, they make more progress towards long-term goals.
#2 Learning & adapting 	Evaluation helps organizations learn and improve. Achieving long-term, positive change is complex. Evaluation helps decision-makers get the data they need to make important decisions about how to improve.
#3 Aligning intentions & practice 	Good intentions are not enough. Implementing ideas—even the very best of ideas—is hard! History is filled with seemingly good ideas that have gone horribly wrong. Ongoing evaluation helps you catch problems early so your great ideas stay on track.
#4 Being pragmatic 	Pragmatism. Funders like it when you do evaluation. In fact, many funders require evaluation as part of their funding commitments. The new Foundations for Evidence Based Policy Making Act requires certain federal agencies to issue evaluation plans describing the evaluation activities they intend to carry out.

The evaluator's three golden questions



When organizations use evaluation information to adapt their programs, they make more progress towards long-term goals

(Clinton, 2014).

FIND AN EVALUATION APPROACH THAT SUITS YOUR NEEDS

There is no one way to do evaluation. Instead, evaluation is most useful when it is carefully matched to your learning needs. Start your evaluation journey by defining what you want to get out of evaluation, then find an evaluation approach to fit those needs.

Here are a few ways you might approach evaluation.

What do you want to learn?	Why? How do you want to use the findings?	Sounds like you're interested in...	
<i>We want to know if our work makes a difference to the community.</i>	...so that we can decide whether to continue investing in the initiative.	An outcome or impact evaluation.	Outcome + impact evaluations address questions like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What outcomes did the program achieve? • How valuable are these outcomes for participants and the community?
<i>We want to know what's happening on the ground. What's working well and what should we change?</i>	...so that we can improve our program design and its implementation.	An implementation (process) evaluation.	Implementation evaluations address questions like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the quality of the program design? • How well is the program being implemented? • What factors contribute to successful implementation? • What factors hinder successful implementation?
<i>We want to know which parts of our program work best.</i>	...so that we can grow, expand, and scale up our offering.	An implementation evaluation PLUS an outcome evaluation.	Implementation + outcome evaluations address questions like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What outcomes did the program achieve? • How valuable are these outcomes for participants and the community? • Which program components contributed most to successful outcomes? • Which program components contributed least to successful outcomes?
<i>We're dealing with a complex social issue that has no clear solution. We're innovating and want to learn about how our innovation is working.</i>	...so that we can continuously adapt and improve, refining our design over time.	A developmental evaluation.	Developmental evaluations ask questions like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we see on the ground as the initiative rolls out? • What do initial results suggest about progress towards goals? • How have contextual features influenced what we're seeing?

If you'd like to talk more about evaluation, contact the Center for Research Evaluation (CERE) at the University of Mississippi.

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