

Types of evaluation and example questions associated with each type

It is important to understand the type of evaluation you are undertaking because it is fundamental to the planning and implementation of an evaluation. The kind of evaluation you are planning will determine the types of questions you are likely to ask and will influence the study design and data collection.

Needs assessment

A needs assessment is a process for assessing gaps between current results and desired results (that is, needs) and then for applying that information to identify the available options so that decisions can be made about what might work to meet the need. This type of evaluation determines who needs the program, how great the need is, and what might work to meet the need. It verifies and maps the extent of a problem. Needs assessments are often used to help design a new program.

Example questions:

- What are the target population's characteristics?
- What are their needs? (i.e. gaps)
- What do they already know
- What specific services are needed?
- How could those services be provided? Through what mechanisms or arrangements?

Formative evaluation

Formative evaluation provides direction for improving project implementation & operation. Formative evaluation questions focus on understanding the extent to which projects are functioning as expected, uncovering barriers to participation, and highlighting strengths and weaknesses. It often occurs in a project's early stage, but it can be done any time new things are implemented. Typically, the findings from formative evaluations are provided as feedback to the programs evaluated.

Example questions:

- To what extent are you performing the services or activities as planned? What factors, if any, affect ability to implement your program as planned?
- To what degree did the target audience participate in activities? If they didn't participate as you expected, why not? Were some individuals or groups over- or under-represented? Why?
- Were the services/materials perceived as valuable by the intended audience?
- To what degree were people satisfied with the services or activities? Who was most or least satisfied? Why?
- To what degree are participants experiencing the hoped for benefits of the program?
- What are staff reactions? What are their perceptions of what could be improved?

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Summative evaluation

Summative evaluations assess the effectiveness of a program in producing change. They focus on the difficult questions of what happened to program participants, how much of a difference the program made, and the degree to which its goals were met. This type of evaluation is arguably what is considered most often as *evaluation* – that is, finding out what the project achieved. Summative evaluation is outcome-focused more than process focused. Summative evaluations answer questions about program quality and impact and often take later in a program's life cycle.

Example questions:

- To what extent have intended goals/outcomes been achieved? (For example: To what degree has the project helped advance science, better prepare the workforce, build community?)
- Is the target audience experiencing the changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, interest, motivation, behaviors, or awareness that were sought?
- What were the unanticipated outcomes, if any?