



Tool 001/July 08

INTRODUCTION TO EVALUATION

WHAT IS EVALUATION?

- There are many different levels and types of evaluations, which have different purposes, focuses, methods, and intended audiences. Evaluation is not just one thing, or kind of activity.
- While the word evaluation implies judging the value of something, in reality the practice of evaluation is much broader, and can include for example an assessment of quality, or whether a programme or project is being implemented as planned.
- It would be fair to say that all evaluations have in common a *systematic* method of *acquiring and assessing information* rather than *assessing worth or merit* because all evaluation work involves collecting and sifting through data and making judgements about the validity of the information and of conclusions we make from it.
- In general, the goal of most evaluations is to provide useful feedback.
- Most importantly, it is highly desirable that the evaluation questions are considered at the beginnings of a project/programme, and that where possible the evaluation components are *built into the project/programme itself*.

WHY IS EVALUATION USEFUL?

While measuring ultimate outcomes may be one focus of evaluation, it can have many other uses.

- One of the core strengths of evaluation is the contribution it can make to the continuous review and improvement of a project or programme. Information collected through evaluation can be fed back into the project/programme to improve quality, and influence future programme planning¹.
- Also, while measuring outcomes can be useful, in isolation it does not tell you why something happened (or why not!), or which bit of the project may have contributed.

To summarise, evaluation can:

1. assess the effectiveness of a project/programme in achieving its objectives
2. distinguish between the programme and external influences on outcomes (when the project is based on sound design)
3. facilitate project/programme improvement through a modification of current operations.

WHO CAN DO EVALUATION?

Evaluation can be carried out by anyone, ranging from:

- self-evaluation/quality management by project or programme implementers
- facilitated self-evaluation with the help of an evaluator
- external evaluation where an independent evaluator reviews the project/programme.

See the summaries below of how the different approaches to evaluation may be useful.

¹ For a useful diagram of the “Planning-evaluation cycle”, see <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/pecycle.php>

WHAT KINDS OF EVALUATION ARE THERE?

The different types of evaluation can be categorised.

- **Formative:** examining how a project/programme is developed, including the background to the definition of the problem or the issue being addressed, and the strategies that may effectively address it.
- **Process:** focusing on how a project/programme is delivered. This can include measurement of indicators and outputs.
- **Outcome** (or summative): measuring what impact(s) a project/programme has had.

To many people evaluation is associated with measuring the last type – that is, high level, final project/programme outcomes. For example, at Te Pou we are interested in whether our activities are making a difference to the mental health sector, and in the long term, to the population’s mental health status. However, that is not the only use of evaluation, as is highlighted below.

HOW DO I DECIDE WHAT KIND OF EVALUATION A PROJECT/PROGRAMME MAY NEED?

- A number of different factors need to be considered when choosing what kind of evaluation may be appropriate.
- Decisions about evaluation are often contingent on practical factors, such as budget and timeframe; the viability of evaluation resource (whether internal or external) along with the political context of the project/programme.
- In the first instance, get in touch with the Te Pou research team, who would be happy to provide you with assistance and discuss what options you may wish to consider.

Below is a table providing a few examples of factors that may influence the kind of evaluation that may be most suitable for a particular project/programme (note – this is by no means an exhaustive list). In the ‘Who for?’ column, it is assumed that a good evaluation should always represent the best interests of the people for whom the project/programme was designed (target group/service users/ clients).

What are we measuring?	How?	Who for?	Why?
Project/programme development	Formative/process evaluation	Project/programme Managers	Decisions about project/programme design and implementation
Project/programme implementation	Process/output evaluation	Project/programme Managers	Quality improvement; stimulate innovation
What parts of the programme worked/didn't work?	Process/output evaluation	Project/programme Managers; others in the sector	Quality improvement; transference of ideas
Impact on project/programme users	Outcome (medium/long term) evaluation	Project/programme funders; policy makers	Review of project/programme value
What impact did it have on the sector?	Outcome (long term) evaluation	Policy makers; funders	Decisions about ongoing/future project/programmes

HOW DO I DECIDE WHO IS BEST TO DO THE EVALUATION?²

WHY USE SELF-EVALUATION?

- Managerial responsibility for quality.
- Every manager is responsible for the quality or effectiveness of his/her own programme.
- Evaluation is an integral part of management.
- Leadership – helping staff identify goals and think about quality and value.
- Evaluation helps staff think about the purpose of their work, the desired outputs and outcomes and what it means to produce quality and create value.
- Innovation and experimentation.
- Quality improvement – experimenting with new and innovative ideas/methods for adding value.
- Evaluation – finding out which of those ideas/methods worked best, and should be implemented more widely.

WHY USE FACILITATED SELF-EVALUATION?

- Facilitated self-evaluation provides an excellent opportunity for “learning by doing”.
- To set up a good self-evaluation system.
- A facilitated self-evaluation can be used to set up a system that can later be used by staff without outside expertise.
- As an organisational change intervention.
- Participation in a facilitated self-evaluation process can help change organisational culture (thinking and behaviour).

WHY USE EXTERNAL EVALUATION?

- A fresh set of eyes.
- What is our self-evaluation process missing?
- Especially useful for finding unexpected results/ripple effects, and/or new ways of thinking about the intervention.
- A source of new ideas.
- External evaluation consultants have often seen many programmes of this type, and can bring best practice ideas from what they have seen elsewhere.
- Independence.
- Someone with no vested interest in the programme.
- Less biased toward looking for a particular result.
- Important for accountability and perceived objectivity.
- Skilled in a wider range of tools and methods to address the particular needs for the project.

² Source: Davidson, J. *Mainstreaming Evaluation into Organisational Culture*. Presentation for the Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association’s Auckland Branch. October 19, 2006E.
<http://davidsonconsulting.co.nz>