SAGE reference

The SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation

Evaluation

This PDF has been generated from SAGE Knowledge. Please note that the pagination of the online version will vary from the pagination of the print book.

Evaluation is a process, discipline, and, in some cases, an intervention in and of itself. It entails the systematic application of social science research to plan for and learn about the impact of policy, performance, programs, or initiatives in order to create, further, or sustain social change. The policies, performances, and initiatives being evaluated are called *evaluands*. Evaluation is performed in sociopolitical environments and political influences, and their implications must be considered throughout the process.

From struggles to provide quality education and public health, to environmental dilemmas, societies across the world face issues that often require planning, policy, and subsequent action to address. Unfortunately, strategies often do not obtain the desired effect because projects are not implemented as planned, policies are disconnected from the communities they are supposed to benefit, or programs are not well planned.

According to evaluation expert Michael Scriven, evaluation examines the merit and worth of the evaluand. However, the examination is often not the end but the means to making change through contributing to a decision or using the results for advocacy purposes, as in the transformative paradigm, a framework for evaluation that places importance on groups that have been marginalized. For example, the purpose of an evaluation of a school district's new program for reading by third grade would be to assess how effective the program is for all students, especially disadvantaged students in the district. Using this example, the process of evaluation would include:

a. identifying and engaging stakeholders, or people who have different stakes in the process, such as students, teachers, parents, school administrators, and communities.
b. constructing relevant and answerable questions, such as "To what extent did students enhance their reading skills?" "What worked and did not work? For whom? Why?" "What are the most pressing needs for low-income K–3rd grade students in the district?" and "What community assets can be used to address those needs? How?"
c. choosing data collection methods, such as tracking reading grades, interviewing students, surveying teachers, and holding focus groups with parents.
d. collecting and analyzing the data. The data and subsequent analysis used to answer questions such as these are, ideally, used to make changes necessary to effectively address the problem of focus, such as reading by third grade.
e. synthesizing and disseminating the results.
f. taking appropriate action to help those results make a difference in the evaluand and ultimately for the intended community.

Given the complexity, human dynamics, and sociopolitical nature of evaluation, there are various skills needed to successfully complete an evaluation. Skills in areas such as analysis, social skills, project management, critical self-reflection, negotiation, and advocacy allow evaluators to execute the technical components and navigate the social world of evaluation to make social change.

See alsoAmerican Evaluation Association; Culturally Responsive Evaluation; Data-Driven Decision Making; Goals and Objectives; Outcomes; Program Evaluation; Transformative Paradigm

Dominica McBride
http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781506326139.n240
10.4135/9781506326139.n240
Further Readings

Davidson, E. J. (2005). Evaluation methodology basics: The nuts and bolts of sound evaluation. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mertens, D. M., & Wilson, A. T. (2012). Program evaluation theory and practice: A comprehensive guide. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Rossi, P. H., Lipsey, M. W., & Freeman, H. E. (2004). Evaluation: A systematic approach (7th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.