# PROGRAM EVALUATION FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

## FOUNDATIONS OF EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS

**8TH EDITION**

Richard M. Grinnell, Jr.

Peter A. Gabor

Yvonne A. Unrau

OXFORD

# PROGRAM EVALUATION
## FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

# PROGRAM EVALUATION FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

## FOUNDATIONS OF EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS

8TH EDITION

Richard M. Grinnell, Jr.

Peter A. Gabor

Yvonne A. Unrau

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

# Contents

# Preface

The first edition of our book appeared on the scene nearly three decades ago. As with the previous editions, this one is also for graduate-level social work students—as their first introduction to program evaluation. We have selected and arranged our book's content so it can be mainly used in an introductory social work program evaluation course. To our surprise, our book has also been adopted in management courses, leadership courses, program design courses, program planning courses, social policy courses, as a supplementary text in research methods courses, in addition to field integration seminars.

## TOWARD ACCOUNTABILITY

Pressures for accountability have never been greater. Organizations and practitioners of all types are increasingly required to document the impacts of their services not only at the program level but at the case level as well. Continually, they are challenged to improve the quality of their services and are required to do this with scant resources, at best. This text provides a straightforward view of evaluation while taking into account three issues: (1) the current pressures for accountability within the social services, (2) currently available evaluation technologies and approaches, and (3) the present evaluation needs of students as well as their needs in the first few years of their careers.

## JUST THE BASICS

The three of us have been teaching program evaluation courses for decades. Given our teaching experience—and with the changing demographics of our ever-increasing first-generation university student population—we asked ourselves a simple question: "What program evaluation content can realistically be absorbed, appreciated, and completely understood by our students in a typical one-semester program evaluation course?" The answer to our question is contained within the chapters that follow.

We have avoided information overload at all costs. Nevertheless, as with all introductory program evaluation books, ours too needed to include relevant and basic "evaluation-type" content. Our problem was not so much what content to include as what to leave out.

In a nutshell, our book prepares students to become beginning critical consumers of the professional evaluation literature. It also provides them with an opportunity to see how program evaluations are actually carried out.

## TOWARD EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES AND PROGRAMS

In our opinion, no matter how you slice it, dice it, peel it, cut it, chop it, break it, split it, squeeze it, crush it, or squash it, social work students need to know the fundamentals of how social work programs are created and evaluated if they are to become successful *evidence-based* practitioners, *evidence-informed* practitioners, or practitioners who are implementing *evidence-based programs*.

Where does all of this fundamental "evidence-based" content come from? The answer is that it's mostly obtained from social work research and evaluation courses, journal articles, the internet, and books.

We strongly believe that this "evidence-based" model of practice we're hearing so much about nowadays should be reinforced in all the courses throughout the entire social work curriculum, not just in research and evaluation courses. It all boils down to the simple fact that all social work students must thoroughly comprehend and appreciate—regardless of their specialization—how social work programs are eventually evaluated if they're to become effective social work practitioners.

## GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

As previously mentioned, our main goal is to present only the core material that students *realistically* need to know so they can appreciate and understand the role that evaluation has within professional social work practice. To accomplish this modest goal, we strived to meet three highly overlapping objectives:

1. To prepare students to cheerfully participate in evaluative activities within the programs that hire them after they graduate
2. To prepare students to become beginning critical consumers and producers of the professional evaluative literature
3. And, most important, to prepare students to fully appreciate and understand how case- and program-level evaluations will help them to increase their effectiveness as contemporary social work practitioners

## CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

With the preceding goal and three objectives in mind, we present a unique approach in describing the place of evaluation in the social services. Over the years, little has changed in the way in which most evaluation textbooks present their material; that is, a majority of texts focus on *program-level* evaluation and describe project-type, one-shot approaches, implemented by specialized evaluation departments or external consultants.

On the other hand, a few recent books deal with *case-level* evaluation but place a great deal of emphasis on inferentially powerful—but difficult-to-implement—experimental and multiple baseline designs. Our experiences have convinced us that neither one of these two distinct approaches adequately reflects the realities in our profession—or the needs of students and beginning practitioners for that matter.

Thus, we describe how data obtained through case-level evaluations can be aggregated to provide timely and relevant data for program-level evaluations. Such information, in turn, provides a basic foundation to implement a good quality-improvement process within the entire social service organization. We're convinced that this integration will play an increasingly prominent role in the future.

We have omitted more advanced methodological and statistical material such as a discussion of celebration lines, autocorrelation, effect sizes, and two standard-deviation bands for case-level evaluations, as well as advanced methodological and statistical techniques for program-level evaluations.

Some readers with a strict methodological orientation may find our approach to evaluation as modest. We're well aware of the limitations of the approach we present, but we firmly believe that this approach is more likely to be implemented by beginning practitioners than are other more complicated, technically demanding approaches.

We believe that the aggregation of case-level data can provide valuable feedback about services and programs and can be the basis of an effective quality-improvement process within a social service organization. We think it's preferable to have such data, even if they are not methodologically "airtight," than to have no aggregated data at all. Simply put, our approach is realistic, practical, applied, functional, and, most importantly, student-friendly.

## THEME

We maintain that professional social work practice rests upon the foundation that a worker's practice activities must be directly relevant to obtaining

Social worker engages in practice activities **in order to meet...** → the client's practice objective(s) **in order to meet...** → the program's objective(s) **in order to meet...** → the program's goal.
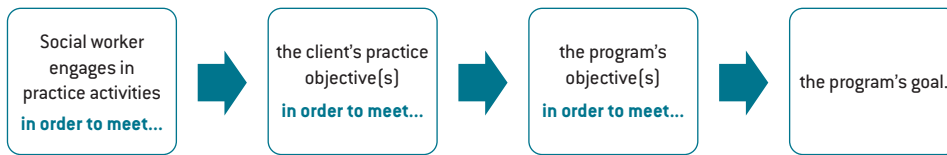
the client's practice objectives, which are linked to the program's objectives, which are linked to the program's goal, which represents the reason why the program exists in the first place. The evaluation process presented in our book heavily reflects these connections.

## WHAT'S NEW?

Producing an eighth edition may indicate that we've attracted loyal followers over the years. Conversely, it also means that making significant changes from one edition to the next can be hazardous to the book's longstanding appeal. New content has been added to this edition in an effort to keep information current, while retaining material that has stood the test of time. With the guidance of many program evaluation instructors and students alike, we have *clarified* material that needed clarification, *deleted* material that needed deletion, and *simplified* material that needed simplification. We have done the customary updating and rearranging of material in an effort to make our book more practical and "student-friendly" than ever before. We have incorporated suggestions by numerous reviewers and students over the years while staying true to our main goal—providing students with a useful and practical evaluation book that they can actually understand and appreciate.

Let's now turn to the specifics of "what's new":

- We have substantially increased our emphasis throughout our book on how to select and implement social work programs and use program logic models to describe programs, select intervention strategies, develop and measure program objectives, and help develop program evaluation questions.

- We have included a brand-new chapter, Chapter 9, titled "Evidence-Based Programs.
- We have significantly revised and expanded four tools that were included in the previous edition's Tool Kit and made them full chapters:
  - Chapter 15: Measuring Program Outcomes
  - Chapter 16: Using Common Evaluation Designs
  - Chapter 17: Collecting Data and Selecting a Sample
  - Chapter 18: Training and Supervising Data Collectors

## WHAT'S THE SAME?

- We didn't delete any chapters.
- We deliberately discuss the application of evaluation methods in real-life social service programs rather than in artificial settings.
- We include human diversity content throughout all chapters in the book. Many of our examples center on women and minorities, in recognition of the need for students to be knowledgeable of their special needs and problems. We give special consideration to the application of evaluation methods to the study of questions concerning these groups by devoting a full chapter to the topic (Chapter 6).
- We have written our book in a crisp style using direct language; that is, students will understand all the words.
- Our book is easy to teach from and with.
- We have made an extraordinary effort to make this edition less expensive, more esthetically pleasing, and much more useful to students than ever before.

- Abundant tables and figures provide visual representation of the concepts presented.
- Boxes are inserted throughout the text to complement and expand on the chapters; these boxes present interesting evaluation examples, provide additional aids to student learning, and offer historical, social, and political contexts of program evaluation.
- The book's website is second to none when it comes to instructor and student resources.

## ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Our book is divided into six parts: Part I: Toward Accountability, Part II: Evaluation Standards, Ethics, and Culture, Part III: The Social Work Program, Part IV: Doing Evaluations, Part V: Gathering Credible Evidence, and Part VI: Making Decisions with Data.
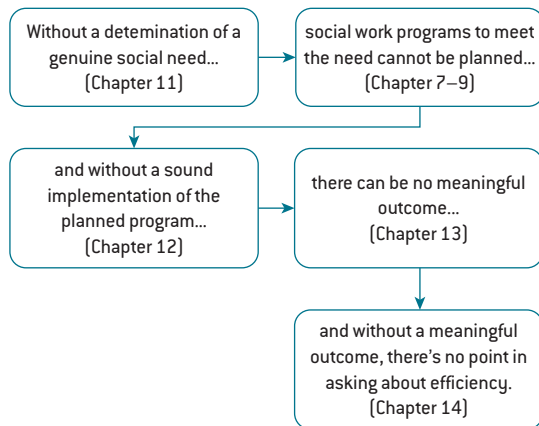
**Part I** discusses how evaluations help make our profession more accountable (Chapter 1) and how all types of evaluations (Chapter 2) use a common process that involves the program's stakeholders right from the get-go (Chapter 3).

**Part II** discusses how every evaluation is influenced by evaluation standards (Chapter 4), ethics (Chapter 5), and culture (Chapter 6). After reading the first two parts, students will be aware of the various contextual issues that are involved in all types of evaluations. They are now ready to actually understand what social work programs are all about—the purpose of Part III.

**Part III** contains chapters that discuss how social work programs are organized (Chapter 7) and how theory of change and program logic models are used not only to create new programs, to refine the delivery services of existing ones, and to guide practitioners in developing practice and program objectives, but to help in the formulation of evaluation questions as well (Chapter 8). Chapter 9 discusses how to find, select, and implement an evidence-based program.

The first chapter in **Part IV**, Chapter 10, describes in detail what students can expect when doing an evaluation before it's actually started. We feel that they will do more meaningful evaluations if they are prepared in advance to address the various issues that will arise when an evaluation actually gets under way—and trust us, issues always arise. When it comes to preparing students to do an evaluation, we have appropriated the British Army's official military adage of "the 7 **P**s": **P**roper **P**lanning and **P**reparation **P**revents **P**iss-**P**oor **P**erformance. Not eloquently stated—but what the heck, it's *official*, so it must be right. The remaining four chapters in Part IV (Chapters 11–14) illustrate the four basic types of program evaluations students can do with all of their "planning skills" in hand. Chapter 11 describes how to do basic needs assessments and explains how they are used in developing new social service programs and refining the services within existing ones. It highlights the four types of social needs within the context of social problems. Chapter 12 presents how we can do a process evaluation once a program is up and running in an effort to refine the services that clients receive and to maintain the program's fidelity. It highlights the purposes of process evaluations and the questions the process evaluation will answer. Chapter 13 provides the rationale for doing outcome evaluations within social service programs. It focuses on the need to develop a solid monitoring system for the evaluation process. Once an outcome evaluation is done, programs can use efficiency evaluations to monitor their cost-effectiveness, the topic of Chapter 14. This chapter highlights the cost–benefit approach to efficiency evaluation and also describes the cost-effectiveness approach. Part IV acknowledges that evaluations can take many forms and presents four of the most common ones. The four types of evaluation discussed in our book are linked in an ordered sequence, as outlined in the following figure:

| | |
|---|---|
| Without a detemination of a genuine social need… (Chapter 11) | social work programs to meet the need cannot be planned… (Chapter 7–9) |
| and without a sound implementation of the planned program… (Chapter 12) | there can be no meaningful outcome… (Chapter 13) |
| | and without a meaningful outcome, there's no point in asking about efficiency. (Chapter 14) |

**Part V** is all about collecting reliable and valid data from various *data sources* (e.g., clients, workers, administrators, funders, existing client files, community members, police, clergy) using various *data-collection methods* (e.g., individual and group interviews, mailed and telephone surveys, observations). Chapter 15 discusses how to measure client and program objectives using measuring instruments like journals and diaries, oral histories, logs, inventories, checklists, and summative scales. Chapter 16 presents the various one- and two-group research designs that can be used in basic program evaluations. Chapter 17 discusses how to collect data for evaluations from a sample of research participants. Chapter 18 explains how to train and supervise the folks who are collecting data for evaluations.

After an evaluation is completed, decisions need to be made from the data collected—the purpose of **Part VI**. Chapter 19 describes how to develop a data-information system and Chapter 20 discusses how to make decisions from the data that have been collected. Chapter 21 outlines how to effectively communicate the findings derived from a program evaluation.

## INSTRUCTOR RESOURCES

Instructors have a password-protected tab (Instructor Resources) on the book's website that contains links. Each link is broken down by chapter. They are invaluable and you are encouraged to use them.

- PowerPoint Slides
- Group Activities
- Online Activities
- Instructor Presentations
- Multiple-Choice and True-False Quiz Questions
- Writing Assignments

## A FINAL WORD

The field of program evaluation in our profession is continuing to grow and develop. We believe this edition will contribute to that growth. A ninth edition is anticipated, and suggestions for it are more than welcome. Please email your comments directly to rick. grinnell@wmich.edu.

If our book helps students to acquire basic evaluation knowledge and skills and assists them in more advanced evaluation and practice courses, our efforts will have been more than justified. If it also assists them to incorporate evaluation techniques into their day-to-day practices, our task will be fully rewarded.

Richard M. Grinnell, Jr.
Peter A. Gabor
Yvonne A. Unrau

# Toward Accountability

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

QUALITY CARE or
your autopsy is free

GLASBERGEN

*"Great news. Social workers are living longer than
ever before. It's nature's way of helping you
pay off your student loans."*

The profession you have chosen to pursue has never been under greater pressure. Public confidence is eroding, our funding is diminishing at astonishing rates, and folks at all levels are demanding for us to increase our accountability; the very rationale for our professional existence is being called into question. We've entered a brand-new era in which only our best social work programs—those that can demonstrate they provide needed, useful, and competent client-centered services—will survive.

## THE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

How do we go about providing these "client-centered accountable services" that will appease our

skeptics? The answer is simple: We use the quality improvement process—not only within our individual day-to-day social work practice activities but also within the very programs in which we work. The evaluation of our services can be viewed at two basic levels:

1. The case level (called *case-level* evaluations)
2. The program level (called *program-level* evaluations)

In a nutshell, case-level evaluations assess the effectiveness and efficiency of our individual cases while program-level evaluations appraise the effectiveness and efficiency of the programs where we work.

> The goal of the quality improvement process is to deliver excellent social work services, which in turn will lead to increasing our profession's accountability.

We must make a commitment to continually look for new ways to make the services we offer our clients more responsive, effective, and efficient. Quality improvement means that we must continually monitor and adjust (when necessary) our practices, both at the case level and at the program level.

### Case-Level Evaluations

As you know from your previous social work practice courses, it's at the case level (or at the practitioner level, if you will) that we provide direct services to our various client systems such as individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations, and communities. At the case level, you simply evaluate your effectiveness with a single client system, or case. It's at this level that you will customize your evaluation plans to learn about specific details and patterns of change that are unique to your specific client system.

Suppose, for example, that you're employed as a community outreach worker for the elderly and it's your job to help aging clients remain safely living in their homes as long as possible before assisted living arrangements are needed. The support you would provide to an 82-year-old African-American man with diabetes would be vastly different from the support

you would provide to a 53-year-old Asian woman who is beginning to show signs of dementia.

Furthermore, the nature of the services you would provide to each of these two very different clients would be adjusted depending on how much family support each has, their individual desires for independent living, their level of receptivity to your services, and other assessment information that you would gather about both of them. Consequently, your plan to evaluate the individualized services you would provide to each client would, by necessity, involve different measures, different data-collection plans, and different recording procedures.

### Program-Level Evaluations

In most instances, social workers help their individual clients under the auspices of some kind of social service program that employs multiple workers, all of whom are trained and supervised according to the policies and procedures set by the program in which they work.

> The evaluation of a social service *program* is nothing more than the aggregation of its individual *client cases*.

Typically, every worker employed by a program is assigned a caseload of clients. Simply put, we can think of the evaluation of any social service program as an aggregation of its individual client cases; that is, all clients assigned to every worker in the same program are all included in the "program" evaluation. When conducting program-level evaluations we are mostly interested in the overall characteristics of all the clients and the average pattern of change for all of them served by a program. Remember one important point: Unlike case-level evaluations, program evaluations are interested in our clients as a group, not as individuals. Figure 1.1 illustrates how case- and program-level evaluations are the building blocks of our continued quest to provide better services for our clients.

As shown in Figure 1.1, the quality improvement process is accomplished via two types of evaluations: case and program. This process then
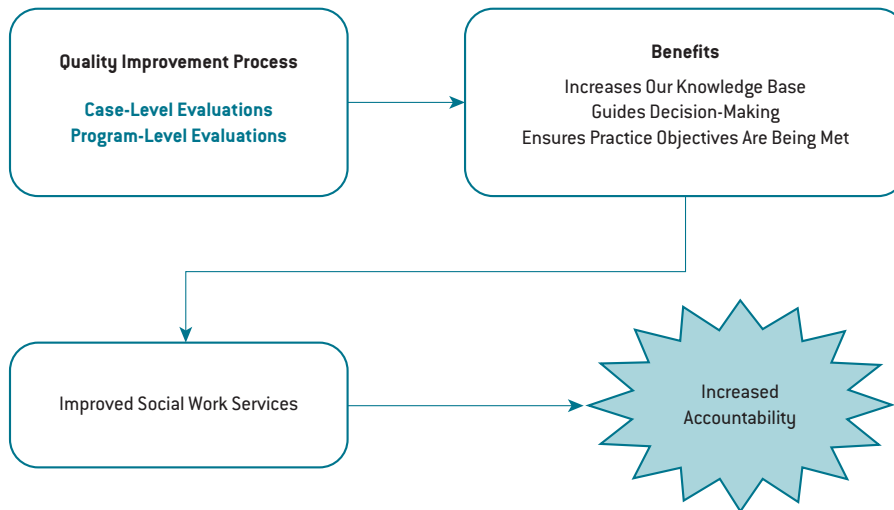
Figure 1.1: The Continuum of Professionalization

produces three desired benefits that are relevant to social workers at all levels of practice (discussed later in this chapter), which in turn leads to providing better services to our clients, which in turn enhances our accountability.

## MYTH

Few social work practitioners readily jump up and down with ecstasy and fully embrace the concepts of "case- and program-level evaluations," "the quality improvement process," and "accountability" as illustrated in Figure 1.1. However, in today's political environment, it's simply a matter of survival that we do. Moreover, it's the ethically and professionally right thing to do.

Nevertheless, some social work students, practitioners, and administrators alike resist performing or participating in evaluations that can easily enhance the quality of the services they deliver, which in turn enhances our overall credibility, accountability, and usefulness to society. Why is there such resistance when, presumably, most of us would agree that trying to improve the quality of our services is a highly desirable aspiration? This resistance is unfortunately founded on one single myth: Evaluations that guide the quality improvement process within

our profession cannot properly be applied to the art of social work practice. And since social work practice is mainly an art form, accountability is a nonissue.

This myth undercuts the concept of evaluation when in fact evaluations are used to develop evidence-based programs. The myth springs from two interrelated sources:

1. Philosophical biases
2. Fear and anxiety (evaluation phobia)

### Philosophical Biases

A few diehard social workers continue to maintain that the evaluation of social work services—or the evaluation of anything, for that matter—is impossible, never really objective, politically incorrect, meaningless, and culturally insensitive. This belief is based purely on a philosophical bias.

Our society tends to distinguish between "art" and "evaluation." "Evaluation" is incorrectly thought of as "science" or, heaven forbid, "research/evaluation." This is a socially constructed dichotomy that is peculiar to our modern industrial society. It leads to the unspoken assumption that a person can be an "artist" or an "evaluator" but not both, and certainly not both at the same time. It's important to remember that evaluation is not science by any stretch of the imagination. However, it does use conventional

tried-and-true scientific techniques whenever possible, as you will see throughout this entire book.

Artists, as the myth has it, are sensitive and intuitive people who are hopeless at mathematics and largely incapable of logical thought. Evaluators, on the other hand, who use "scientific techniques," are supposed to be cold and insensitive creatures whose ultimate aim, some believe, is to reduce humanity to a scientific nonhuman equation.

## Evaluation is not science.

Both of the preceding statements are absurd, but a few of us may, at some deep level, continue to subscribe to them. Some of us may believe that social workers are artists who are warm, empathic, intuitive, and caring. Indeed, from such a perspective, the very thought of evaluating a work of art is almost blasphemous.

Other social workers, more subtly influenced by the myth, argue that evaluations carried out using appropriate evaluation methods do not produce results that are useful and relevant in human terms. It's true that the results of some evaluations that are done to improve the quality of our social service delivery system are not directly relevant to individual line-level social workers and their respective clients. This usually happens when the evaluations were never intended to be relevant to those two groups of people in the first place. Perhaps the purpose of such an evaluation was to increase our knowledge base in a specific problem area—maybe it was simply more of a "pure" evaluation than an "applied" one.

Or perhaps the data were not interpreted and presented in a way that was helpful to the social workers who were working within the program. Nevertheless, the relevance argument goes beyond saying that an evaluation may produce irrelevant data that spawn inconsequential information to line-level workers. It makes a stronger claim: that evaluation methods cannot produce relevant information, because human problems have nothing to do with numbers and "objective" data. In other words, evaluation, as a concept, has nothing to do with social work practice.

As we have previously mentioned, the idea that evaluation has no place in social work springs from society's perceptions of the nature of evaluation and the nature of art. Since one of the underlying assumptions of this book is that evaluation does indeed belong in social work, it's necessary to explore these perceptions a bit more.

### Perceptions of the Nature of Evaluation

It can be argued that the human soul is captured most accurately not in paintings or in literature but in advertisements. Marketers of cars are very conscious that they are selling not transportation but power, prestige, and social status; their ads reflect these concepts. In the same way, the role of evaluation is reflected in ads that begin, "Evaluators (or researchers) say . . ."

Evaluation has the status of a minor deity. It does not just represent power and authority; it *is* power and authority. It's worshiped by many and slandered with equal fervor by those who see in it the source of every human ill.

Faith in the evaluation process can of course have unfortunate effects on the quality improvement process within our profession. It may lead us to assume, for example, that evaluators reveal "truth" and that their "findings" (backed by "scientific and objective" research and evaluation methods) have an unchallengeable validity.

> Those of us who do social work evaluations sometimes do reveal "objective truth," but we also spew "objective gibberish" at alarming rates.

Conclusions arrived at by well-accepted evaluative methods are often valid and reliable, but if the initial clarification of the problem area to be evaluated is fuzzy, biased, or faulty, the conclusions (or findings) drawn from such an evaluation are unproductive and worthless. Our point is that the evaluation process is not infallible; it's only one way of attaining the "truth." It's a tool, or sometimes a weapon, that we can use to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the services we offer to our clients. A great deal will be said in this

book about what evaluation can do for our profession. We will also show what it cannot do, because evaluation, like everything else in life, has its drawbacks.

Evaluations are only as "objective" and "bias-free" as the evaluators who do them. For example, people employed by the tobacco industry who do "objective" evaluations to determine if smoking causes lung cancer, or whether the advertisement of tobacco products around schoolyards influences children's using tobacco products in the future, may come up with very different conclusions than people employed by the American Medical Association to do the same studies. And then there's the National Rifle Association's take on the Second Amendment. Get the point?

> Evaluations are only as "objective" and "bias-free" as the evaluators who do them.

### Perceptions of the Nature of Art

Art, in our society, has a lesser status than evaluation, but it too has its shrines. Those who produce art are thought to dwell on an elevated spiritual plane that is inaccessible to lesser souls. The forces of artistic creation—intuition and inspiration—are held to be somehow "higher" than the mundane, plodding reasoning of evaluative methods. Such forces are also thought to be delicate, to be readily destroyed or polluted by the opposing forces of reason, and to yield conclusions that may not (or cannot) be challenged.

Art is worshiped by many who are not artists and defamed by others who consider it to be pretentious, frivolous, or divorced from the "real world." Again, both the worship and the denigration can lead to unfortunate results. Intuition and experience, for example, are valuable assets for social workers. However, they should neither be dismissed as unscientific or silly nor regarded as superior forms of "knowing" that can never lead us astray (Grinnell & Unrau, 2018; Grinnell, Unrau, & Williams, 2018b).

### Evaluation and Art Unite!

The art of social work practice and the use of concrete and well-established evaluative methods to help

us in the quality improvement process can easily co-exist. Social workers can, in the best sense *and* at the same time, be both "caring and sensitive artists" and "hard-nosed evaluators." Evaluation and art are interdependent and interlocked. They are both essential to the survival of our profession.
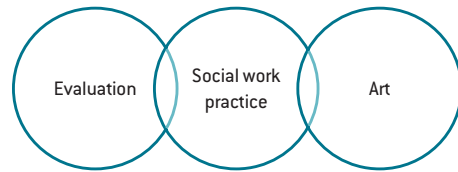


### Fear and Anxiety (Evaluation Phobia)

The second source that fuels resistance to the quality improvement process via the use of evaluations is that evaluations of all kinds are horrific events whose consequences should be feared. This of course leads to a great deal of anxiety among those of us who are fearful of them. Social workers, for instance, can easily be afraid of an evaluation because it's they who are being evaluated; it's their programs that are being judged.

They may be afraid for their jobs, their reputations, and their clients, or they may be afraid that their programs will be curtailed, abandoned, or modified in some unacceptable way. They may also be afraid that the data an evaluation obtains about them and their clients will be misused. They may believe that they no longer control these data and that the client confidentiality they have so very carefully preserved may be breached.

> It's rare for a program to be abandoned because of a negative evaluation.

In fact, these fears and anxieties have some basis. Programs are sometimes axed as a result of an evaluation. In our view, however, it's rare for a program to be abandoned because of a negative evaluation. They usually go belly-up because they're not doing what the funder originally intended, and/or they're not keeping up with the current needs of their local community and continue to deliver an antiquated service that the funding source no longer wishes to support.

It's not uncommon for them to be terminated because of the current political climate. Unfortunately, and more often than you think, they just die on the vine and dwindle away into the abyss due to unskilled administrators.

On the other side of the coin, a positive evaluation may mean that a social work program can be expanded or similar programs put into place. And those who do evaluations are seldom guilty of revealing data about a client or using data about staff members to retard their career advancement. Since the actual outcome of an evaluation is so far removed from the mythical one, it cannot be just the results and consequences of an evaluation that generate fear and anxiety: It's simply the idea of being judged.

It's helpful to illustrate the nature of this anxiety using the analogy of the academic examination. Colleges and universities offering social work programs are obliged to evaluate their students so that they do not release unqualified practitioners upon an unsuspecting public. Sometimes, this is accomplished through a single examination set at the end of a course. More often, however, students are evaluated in an ongoing way, through regular assignments and frequent small quizzes. There may or may not be a final examination, but if there is one, it's worth less and thus feared less.

> One of the disadvantages of doing an ongoing evaluation of a program is that the workers have to carry it out.

Most students prefer the second, ongoing course of evaluation. A single examination on which the final course grade depends is a traumatic event, whereas a midterm, worth 40%, is less dreadful, and a weekly 10-minute quiz marked by a fellow student may hardly raise the pulse rate. It is the same way with the evaluation of anything, from social service programs to the practitioners employed by them.

An evaluation of a program conducted once every 5 years by an outside evaluator is a traumatic event, to say the least. On the other hand, ongoing evaluation

conducted by the practitioners themselves as a normal part of their day-to-day activities becomes a routine part of service delivery and is no big shakes. The point is that "evaluation phobia" stems from a false view of what an evaluation necessarily involves.

Of course, one of the disadvantages of doing an ongoing evaluation of a program is that the workers have to carry it out. Some may fear it because they do not know how to do it: They may never have been taught the quality improvement process during their university studies, and they may fear both the unknown and the specter of the "scientific."

One of the purposes of this book is to alleviate the fear and misunderstanding that currently shroud the quality improvement process and to show that some forms of evaluations can be conducted in ways that are beneficial and lead to the improvement of the services we offer clients.

## WHY EVALUATIONS ARE GOOD FOR OUR PROFESSION

We have discussed two major reasons why social workers may resist the concept of evaluation—philosophical biases in addition to fear and anxiety. The next question is: Why should evaluations not be resisted? Why are they needed? What are they for? We have noted that the fundamental reason for conducting evaluations is to improve the quality of our services. As can easily be seen in Figure 1.1, evaluations also have three purposes:

1. To help increase our knowledge base
2. To help guide us in making decisions
3. To help determine if we are meeting our client objectives

All three of these reasons to do evaluations within our profession are highly intertwined and are not mutually exclusive. Although we discuss each one in isolation of the others, you need to be fully aware that they all overlap. We start off our discussion with how evaluations are used to increase our knowledge base.

### Increase Our Knowledge Base

Knowledge-based evaluations can be used in the quality improvement process in the following ways:

- To gather data from social work professionals in order to develop theories about social problems
- To test developed theories in actual practice conditions
- To develop treatment interventions on the basis of actual program operations
- To test treatment interventions in actual practice settings

One of the basic prerequisites of helping people to help themselves is knowing what to do. To know how to help, social workers need to have both practice skills and relevant knowledge.

Child sexual abuse, for example, has come to prominence as a social problem only during the past few decades, and many questions remain: Is the sexual abuse of children usually due to the individual pathology in the perpetrators, to dysfunctions in family systems, or to a combination of the two? If individual pathology is the underlying issue, can the perpetrator be treated in a community-based program, or would institutionalization be more effective? If family dysfunction is the issue, should clients be immediately referred to family support/preservation services, or should some other intervention be offered, such as parent training? To answer these and other questions, we need to acquire general knowledge from a variety of sources in an effort to increase our knowledge base in the area of child sexual abuse.

One of the most fruitful sources of this knowledge is from the practitioners who are active in the field. What do they look for? What do they do? Which of their interventions are most effective? For example, it may have been found from experience that family therapy offered immediately is effective only when the abuse by the perpetrator was affection-based, intended as a way of showing love. On the other hand, when the abuse is aggression-based, designed to fulfill the power needs of the perpetrator, individual therapy may be more beneficial. If similar data are gathered from a number of evaluation studies, theories may be formulated about the different kinds of treatment interventions most likely to be effective with different types of perpetrators who abuse their children. Once formulated, a theory must be tested. This too can be achieved by using complex evaluation designs and data analyses.

The data gathered to increase our general knowledge base are sometimes presented in the form of statistics. The conclusions drawn from the data apply to groups of clients (*program-level* evaluation) rather than to individual clients (*case-level* evaluation) and thus will probably not be helpful to a particular practitioner or client in the short term. However, many workers and their future clients will benefit in the long term, when evaluation findings have been synthesized into theories, those theories have been tested, and effective treatment interventions have been derived.

As it stands, the day-to-day interventions that we use in our profession could benefit from a bit of improvement. For instance, we lack the know-how to stop family violence, to eradicate discrimination, and to eliminate human suffering that comes with living in poverty, be it in our own country, where poverty is found in isolated pockets, or in developing countries, where poverty is more pervasive.

> Evaluations will eventually help social workers to know exactly *what* to do, *where* to do it, *when* to do it, and *who* to do it to.

Through social work education we learn theory/research/evaluation that, in turn, we are expected to translate into useful interventions to help our clients. You only need to come face to face with a few social work scenarios to realize the limits of our profession's knowledge base in helping you to know exactly *what* to do, *where* to do it, *when* to do it, and *who* to do it to.

For example, imagine that you are the social worker expected to intervene in the following situations:

- An adolescent who is gay has been beaten by his peers because of his sexual preference.

- A neighborhood, predominantly populated by families of color with low incomes, has unsafe rental housing, inadequate public transportation, and under-resourced public schools.
- A family is reported to child protection services because the parents refuse to seek needed medical attention for their sick child based on their religious beliefs.
- Officials in a rural town are concerned about the widespread use of methamphetamine in their community.

Despite the complexity of these scenarios, there's considerable public pressure on social workers to "fix" such problems. As employees of social work programs, social workers are expected to stop parents from abusing their children, keep inner-city youth from dropping out of school, prevent discrimination in society, and eliminate other such social problems.

If that's not enough, we're expected to achieve positive outcomes in a timely manner with less-than-adequate financial resources. And all of this is occurring under a watchful public eye that is only enhanced by the 24/7 news cycle.

### One Client and One Program at a Time

So how can we provide effective client services *and* advance our profession's knowledge base—at the same time? The answer is simple: one client and one program at a time, by evaluating our individual practices with our clients and evaluating our programs as a whole.

We fully support the National Association of Social Workers' philosophy of quality improvement by continually and systematically looking for new ways to make the services we provide our clients more responsive, efficient, and effective. As we know by now, this is the ultimate goal of the quality improvement process in the social services.

Our profession—and all of us as social workers—must be able to provide solid reasons for the policies and positions we take. As we know, evaluation procedures are an integral part of competent social work practice. Just as practitioners must be prepared

to explain their reasons for pursuing a particular intervention with a particular client system, a social service program must also be prepared to provide a rationale for the implementation of the evidence-based treatment intervention it is using.

### Using a Knowledge Base

You're expected to have not only a good heart and good intentions but the skills and knowledge to convert your good intentions into desired practical results that will actually help your clients. It all boils down to the fact that that we need to acquire the knowledge and skills to help our clients in as effective and efficient a manner as possible.

> We must continually and systematically look for new ways to make the services we provide our clients more responsive, efficient, and effective.

Professional social workers have an influential role in helping to understand and ameliorate the numerous social and economic problems that exist in our society. The very nature of our profession puts us directly in the "trenches" of society; that is, we interface with people and the problems that prevent them from enjoying the quality of life that the majority of our society has. We practice in such places as inner-city neighborhoods and hospices and work with people such as those who are homeless and mentally challenged.

Consequently, many social workers experience firsthand the presenting problems of clients, many of which result from societal injustices. As part of our profession, we are expected to help make things better, not only for our clients but also for the society in which we all live.

### Guide Decision-Making at All Levels

A second reason for doing evaluations is to gather data in an effort to provide information that will help our stakeholder groups to make decisions. The people who make decisions from evaluation studies are called *stakeholders*. Many kinds of decisions

have to be made about our programs, from administrative decisions about funding a specific evidence-based social work intervention to a practitioner's decision about the best way to serve a specific client (e.g., individual, couple, family, group, community, organization).

The very process of actually doing an evaluation can also help open up communication among our stakeholders at all levels of a program's operations. Each stakeholder group provides a unique perspective, as well as having a different interest or "stake" in the decisions made within our programs.

Evaluation by its very nature forces us to consider the perspectives of different stakeholder groups and thus can help us understand their interests and promote collaborative working relationships. Their main involvement is to help us achieve an evaluation that provides them with useful recommendations that they can use in their internal decision-making processes. There are basically six stakeholder groups that should be involved in all evaluations:

1. Policymakers
2. The general public
3. Program funders
4. Program administrators
5. Social work practitioners
6. Clients, if applicable (i.e., potential, current, past)

### Policymakers

To *policymakers* in governmental or other public entities, any individual program is only one among hundreds—if not thousands. On a general level, policymakers are concerned with broad issues of public safety, fiscal accountability, and human capital. For example, how effective and efficient are programs serving women who have been battered, youth who are unemployed, or children who have been sexually abused?

> A major interest of policymakers is to have comparative data about the effectiveness and efficiency of different social service programs serving similar types of client need.

If one type of program is as effective (produces beneficial client change) as another but also costs more, does the nature or type of service offered to clients justify the greater expense? Should certain types of programs be continued, expanded, modified, cut, or abandoned? How should money be allocated among competing similar programs? In sum, a major interest of policymakers is to obtain comparative data about the effectiveness and efficiency of different social service programs serving similar types of client need. See Chapter 13 for effectiveness evaluations and Chapter 14 for efficiency evaluations.

Policymakers play a key role in allocation of public monies—deciding how much money will be available for various programs such as education, health care, social services, mental health, criminal justice, and so on. Increasingly, policymakers are looking to accreditation bodies to "certify" that social service programs deliver services according to set standards (see Chapter 4 on standards).

### The General Public

Increasingly, taxpayers are demanding that policymakers in state and federal government departments be accountable to *the general public*. Lay groups concerned with special interests such as the care of the elderly, support for struggling families, drug rehabilitation, or child abuse are lobbying to have their interests heard. Citizens want to know how much money is being spent and where it's being spent. Are taxpayers' dollars effectively serving current social needs?

> Evaluation by its very nature forces us to consider the perspectives of different stakeholder groups and can help us understand their interests and promote collaborative working relationships.

The public demand for "evidence" that publicly funded programs are making wise use of the money entrusted to them is growing. The media, internet, and television in particular play a central role in bringing issues of government spending to the public's attention. Unfortunately, the media tends to focus on

worst-case scenarios, intent on capturing public attention in a way that will increase their ratings and the number of consumers tuning in.

Evaluation is a way for social service programs to bring reliable and valid data to the public's attention. Evaluation data can be used for public relations purposes, allowing programs to demonstrate their "public worth." As such, evaluation is more often used as a tool for educating the public—sharing what is known about a problem and how a particular program is working to address it—than a means to report definitive or conclusive answers to complex social problems.

When evaluation data reveal poor performance, then the program's administrators and practitioners can report the changes they have made to program policy or practice in light of the negative results. On the other hand, positive evaluation results can highlight a program's strengths and enhance its public image. Data showing that a program is helping to resolve a social problem such as homelessness may yield desirable outcomes such as allaying the concerns of opposing interest groups or encouraging funders to grant more money.

### Program Funders

And speaking of money . . . *program funders*, the public and private organizations that provide money to social service programs, have a vested interest in seeing their money spent wisely. If funds have been allocated to combat family violence, for example, is family violence declining? And if so, by how much? Could the money be put to better use?

Often funders will insist that some kind of an evaluation of a specific program must take place before additional funds are provided. Program administrators are thus made accountable for the funds they receive. They must demonstrate to their funders that their programs are achieving the best results for the funder's dollars.

### Program Administrators

The priority of *program administrators* is their own program's functioning and survival, but they also have interest in other similar programs, whether they are viewed as competitors or collaborators. Administrators want to know how well their programs operate as a whole, in addition to the functioning of their program's parts, which may include administrative components such as staff training, budget and finance, client services, quality assurance, and so on.

> The general public wants to know how much money is being spent and where it's being spent.

The questions of interest to an administrator are different but not separate from those of the other stakeholder groups already discussed. Is the assessment process at the client intake level successful in screening clients who are eligible for the program's services? Is treatment planning culturally sensitive to the demographic characteristics of clients served by the program? Does the discharge process provide adequate consultation with professionals external to the program?

Like the questions of policymakers, the general public, and funders, administrators have a vested interest in knowing which interventions are effective and which are less so, which are economical, which intervention strategies should be retained, and which could be modified or dropped.

### Social Work Practitioners

Line-level *social work practitioners* who deal directly with clients are most often interested in practical, day-to-day issues: Is it wise to include adolescent male sexual abuse survivors in the same group with adolescent female survivors, or should the males be referred to another service if separate groups cannot be run? What mix of role-play, educational films, discussion, and other treatment activities best facilitates client learning? Will a family preservation program keep families intact? Is nutrition counseling for parents an effective way to improve school performance of children from impoverished homes? The question that ought to be of greatest importance to a practitioner is whether the particular treatment intervention used with a particular client at a particular time is working.

A social work practitioner wants to know whether a particular treatment intervention used with a particular client is working.

However, sometimes stakeholders external to the program impose constraints that make practitioners more concerned with other issues. For example, when an outreach program serving homeless people with mental illness is unable to afford to send workers out in pairs or provide them with adequate communication systems (e.g., cellphones), workers may be more concerned about questions related to personal safety than questions of client progress. Or workers employed by a program with several funding streams may be required to keep multiple records of services to satisfy multiple funders, thus leaving workers to question the wisdom of doing duplicate paperwork instead of focusing on the impact of their services on clients.

### Clients

The voice of *clients* is slowly gaining more attention in evaluation efforts, but our profession has a long way to go before clients are fully recognized as a legitimate stakeholder group. Of course, clients are a unique stakeholder group since they depend on a program's services for help with problems that are adversely affecting their lives. In fact, without clients there would be no reason for a program to exist.

Clients who seek help do so with the expectation that the services they receive will benefit them in some meaningful way. Clients want to know whether our social service programs will help resolve their problems. If the program claims to be able to help, then are ethnic, religious, language, or other matters of diverse client needs evident in the program's service delivery structure?

Clients simply want to know whether our social service programs will help resolve their problems.

In short, is the program in tune with what clients really need? Client voices are being heard more and more as time goes on. And rightfully so! A brief

glimpse at the effectiveness and efficiency of the immediate relief services provided by the U.S. government to the survivors of Hurricanes Katrina (Louisiana) and Maria (Puerto Rico) should ring a bell here. The failure of the Veterans Administration to schedule appointments for veterans in a timely manner is another example of a social service organization not meeting its clients' needs.

#### Ensure that Client Objectives Are Being Met

The third and final purpose of evaluations is to determine if clients are getting what they need; that is, contemporary social work practitioners are interested in evaluating their effectiveness with each and every one client.

Our profession has the responsibility to continually improve our programs in order to provide better services to our clients.

In addition, clients want to know if the services they are receiving are worth their time, effort, and sometimes money. Usually these data are required while treatment is still in progress, as it's scarcely useful to conclude that services were ineffective after the client has left the program. A measure of effectiveness is needed while there may still be time to try a different intervention if the current one is not working. As we know from the beginning of this chapter, case-level evaluations are used to determine if client objectives are being achieved. More will be said about this in Chapter 20.

## COLLABORATION AMONG STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Collaboration involves cooperative associations among the various players from the different stakeholder groups for the purposes of achieving a common goal—building knowledge to better help clients. A collaborative approach accepts that the six common stakeholder groups previously discussed will have diverse perspectives.

Rather than assume one perspective is more valuable than another, each stakeholder group is regarded as having relative importance to achieving a better understanding of how to solve problems and help clients. For example, if a program's workers want to know how a new law will change service provision, then the perspective of policymakers and administrators will have great value. But if a program administrator wants to better understand why potential clients are not seeking available services, then the client perspective may be the most valuable of all the stakeholder groups.
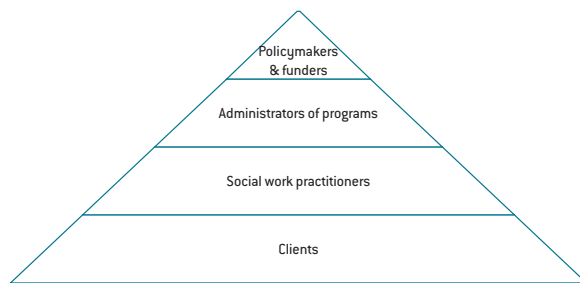


The dominant structure is a hierarchy, which can be thought of as a chain of command with higher levels possessing greater power and authority over lower levels. Typically, policymakers and funders are at the top of the hierarchy, program administrators and workers in the middle, and clients at the bottom.

Critics of this top-down way of thinking might argue that we need to turn the hierarchy upside down, placing clients at the top and all other stakeholder groups at varying levels beneath them. Whatever the power structure of stakeholders for a particular social work program, evaluation is a process that may do as little as have us consider the multiple perspectives of various stakeholder groups or as much as bringing different stakeholder groups together to plan and design evaluation efforts as a team.

Unfortunately, and as it currently stands, a respectful, collaborative working relationship among multiple social service agencies within any given community is neither the hallmark of nor a natural phenomenon in today's social service arena. In fact, it's been our experience that most social service programs do not play and work well with others. Unfortunate, but true.

## ACCOUNTABILITY CAN TAKE MANY FORMS

The three main purposes of conducting evaluations will improve our service delivery system, which in turn will increase our accountability (see Figure 1.1). As mentioned, administrators are accountable to their funders for the way in which money is spent, and the funders are similarly accountable to the public. Usually, accountability will involve deciding whether money should be devoted to this or that activity and then justifying the decision by producing data to support it.

Demonstrating accountability, or providing justification for a program, is a legitimate purpose of an evaluation insofar as it involves a genuine attempt to identify a program's strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes, however, an evaluation of a demonstration project may be undertaken solely because the terms of the grant demand it.

> Accountability means that we are answerable for the actions and decisions we make.

For example, a majority of state and federally funded social work programs are required to have periodic evaluations or their funds will be taken away. In such cases, a program's staff, who are busy delivering services to clients, may inappropriately view the required evaluation as simply a "data-gathering ritual" that's necessary for continued funding. With this in mind, accountability in our profession can be viewed from six vantage points:

1. *Coverage accountability*: Are the persons served those who have been designated as target clients? Are there any other beneficiaries who should not be served? (See Chapter 11.)
2. *Cultural accountability*: Are program employees culturally competent? To what extent are the cultures of clients served

represented in the program's administrative and service delivery structures? We use the broad meaning of *culture* here to reflect diversity in areas of race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and other classifications identifying groups of people that are oppressed or discriminated against in our society. (See Chapter 6.)

3. *Service delivery accountability:* Are a reasonable number of services being delivered? To what extent is service delivery supported by an evidence base? (See Chapters 7–9, 11.)

4. *Fiscal accountability:* Are funds being used properly? Are expenditures properly documented? Are funds used within the limits set by the budget? (See Chapter 14.)

5. *Legal accountability:* Are relevant laws, including those concerning affirmative action, occupational safety and health, and privacy of individual records, being observed? (See Chapter 4.)

6. *Professional accountability:* Are our professional codes of ethics and accreditation standards being met? (See Chapters 4 and 5.)

## SCOPE OF EVALUATIONS

The word *program* can refer to many different things. It may refer to something small, specific, and short-term, such as a film developed for use during a training session on sexually transmitted infections, AIDS, or posttraumatic stress disorder. It may refer to a nationwide effort to combat family violence and include all the diverse endeavors in that field, with different program objectives and their corresponding intervention strategies. Or it may refer to a specific treatment intervention used by a specific social worker and undertaken with a specific client.

Obviously, these different types of programs need to be evaluated using different evaluative methods. One size doesn't fit all! Thus, we need to know what the characteristics of the program are before it can be evaluated. The scope of any evaluation has to be sensitive to the following six program characteristics:

1. *Boundary:* The program may extend across a nation, region, state, province, city, parish, county, or community, or it may be extremely limited—for example, a course presented in an individual agency or school.

2. *Size:* The program may serve individual clients, such as people seeking individual therapy, or many clients, such as people infected with HIV.

3. *Duration:* The program may be designed to last a half-hour—a training film, for example—or it may be an orientation course on child safety lasting 2 days, a group therapy cycle lasting 10 weeks, or a pilot project designed to help the homeless being evaluated after 2 years. Or, as in the case of a child protection agency, it may be intended to continue indefinitely.

4. *Complexity:* Some programs offer integrated components, combining, for instance, child protection services, individual therapy, family therapy, and educational services under one umbrella. Such a program is obviously more complex than one with a simpler, singular focus—for example, providing nutrition counseling to pregnant adolescents.

5. *Clarity and time span of program objectives:* Some programs have objectives that can readily be evaluated: for example, to increase the number of unemployed adolescents who find full-time jobs 2 months after a 6-week training course (the intervention). Others have objectives that will not become evident for some time: for example, to increase the use by seniors of a meals-on-wheels program.

6. *Innovativeness:* Some social service programs follow long-established treatment interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral

therapy; others are experimenting with new ones designed for use with current social problems, such as AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, and posttraumatic stress disorder.

## RESEARCH ≠ EVALUATION

We have been using two words that somehow get interchanged in our day-to-day conversations: *research* and *evaluation*. They are not the same activities: Research is research, and evaluation is evaluation. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2001), perhaps the greatest misunderstanding about the evaluation process is that it must follow the typical process of doing a research study via the use of the scientific method:

> **Research**—conducted, for example, to determine the *causes of domestic violence.*
> from
> **Evaluation—**conducted, for example, to find out whether a particular social work program (intervention) works with its intended audience—*victims of domestic violence.*

Social work professors love to debate the differences and similarities between research and evaluation. Their conversations can be mind-boggling, convoluted, longwinded, and more theoretical than practical. And speaking of practically, who cares?

> In reality, evaluations are nothing more than applying basic "research" concepts to help us evaluate our effectiveness with individual cases and programs.

As you will soon see, evaluation—at the case level and program level—does not occur in a vacuum and is influenced by real-world constraints: countless, practical, everyday constraints. All of our evaluations must be applied, practical, and feasible. In addition, they must be conducted within the confines of our available resources, time, and political contexts.

Evaluation is an enormous but extremely rewarding undertaking.

## DATA ≠ INFORMATION (OR EVIDENCE ≠ INFORMATION)

Just as the words *research* and *evaluation* get confused in most folks' brains, so do *data* and *information.* They too are often inappropriately used interchangeably. In this book, the words *data* and *evidence* are used interchangeably; for example, "Workers collect *data* to determine their effectiveness" is the same as "Workers collect *evidence* to determine their effectiveness."

In a nutshell, the terms *data* and *evidence* signify isolated facts, in numerical form (i.e., numbers) or in text form (i.e., words), that are gathered in the course of an evaluation. How we interpret the data (or evidence) when they have all been collected, collated, and analyzed is called *information.*

For example, data collected in reference to client referral sources gathered from a program's intake unit may indicate that the program accepts 90% of its referrals from other social service programs; only 10% of people are self-referred. One of the many pieces of information (or conclusions or findings drawn from the data) generated by these data may be that the program is somehow more accessible to clients who were referred by other programs than to those who were self-referred. Thus case- and program-level evaluations yield data that are turned into information by practitioners and administrators, respectively, to improve client services.

> The distinction between data (or evidence) and information is simple—data (or evidence) are the facts, while information is the interpretation that we give to these facts.

Together, data and information help guide various decision-making processes in an effort to produce more effective and efficient services to our clients. Producing meaningful and useful data and information for quality improvement in service delivery is a process that involves both the art and science of social

work practice. While we might think of evaluation as a close cousin of science, it also has close relations with art.

Because evaluations occur in the real and "messy" world of social work practice—and not in an isolated, controlled laboratory—useful evaluation designs require creativity and ingenuity just as much as they need logic, procedural detail, and research principles. If evaluation is to help build the knowledge base of our profession, then we must—in the best sense and at the same time—be both "caring and sensitive artists" and "rigorous scientists."

## CHARACTERISTICS OF EVALUATORS

We now turn our attention to the characteristics that all social work evaluators should have, which includes you as a future evaluator (Grinnell, Williams, & Unrau, 2018a). When doing any kind of program evaluation, you must:

1. Be aware of your own values
2. Be a skeptic
3. Share your findings with others
4. Be honest

Let's discuss these four characteristics one at a time, even though they are interrelated.

### Value Awareness

Like a judge (and not Judge Judy!), you must be fully aware of, and be able to set aside, your values when you do an evaluation. Value awareness means that you must know your own values and your evaluation must not be affected by them; that is, you must be unbiased and impartial to the highest degree humanly possible. This means that you, as a mortal social worker, should be able to put aside your personal values when you're conducting an evaluation study and assessing the results obtained through other evaluations.

If your personal value system dictates, for example, that health care should be publicly funded and equally available to everyone, you should still be able to use basic research skills to acquire knowledge about the advantages and disadvantages of a privatized system. If the evidence from your own or someone else's study shows that privatized health care is superior in some respects to the system you believe is best, you should be able to weigh this evidence objectively, even though it may conflict with your personal value system.

### Skeptical Curiosity

Now that you are valueless, you must also become insatiably curious. As you know, knowledge acquired using the scientific method of inquiry is never certain. Scientific "truth" remains true only until new evidence comes along to show that it's not true, or only partly true.

Skeptical curiosity means that all evaluation findings should be—indeed, must be—questioned. Wherever possible, new studies should be conducted by different folks to see if the same results are obtained again. In other words, evaluation studies (whenever possible) should be replicated.

Replication of the same study, with the same results, by another evaluator makes it less likely that the results of the first study were affected by bias, dishonesty, or just plain error. Thus, the findings are more likely to be "true" in the sense that they're more likely to reflect a reality external to the evaluators.

### Sharing

Like your mother said, you must share your stuff with others. Sharing means that the results of your evaluation study and the methods you used to conduct it must be available to everyone so that your study's findings can be critiqued and the study replicated (see Chapter 21 on effective communication and reporting).

It's worth noting that sharing findings from an evaluation study is a modern value. It wasn't that long ago that illiteracy among peasants and women was valued by those who were neither. Knowledge has always been a weapon as well as a tool. Those who know little may be less likely to question the wisdom and authority of those who are above them in the social hierarchy. Public education is thus an enormously powerful social force that allows people to access and question the evidence, or data, upon which their leaders make decisions on their behalf.

### Honesty

Not only must you be valueless, be a skeptic, have a curious nature, and share your findings with others, you must also be honest in what you do, in fact, share. Honesty means, of course, that you are not supposed to fiddle with the results obtained from your study. This may sound fairly straightforward, but, in fact, the results of evaluation studies are rarely as clear-cut as we would like them to be. Quite often, and in the most respectable of social work research centers and institutes, social policies are formulated on the basis of whether one wiggle on a graph is slightly longer than the corresponding woggle.

If *dishonesty* means a deliberate intention to deceive, then probably very few social work evaluators are dishonest. If it means that they allow their value systems and their preconceived ideas to influence their data-collection methods, their data analyses, and their interpretations of the data, then there are probably a few guilty ones among us. In this sense, the term *honesty* includes an obligation, on our part, to be explicit about what our values and ideas are.

> If *dishonesty* means a deliberate intention to deceive, then probably very few social work evaluators are dishonest.

We need to be sufficiently self-aware to both identify our value systems and perceive the effects of these upon our own work, and then we need to be sufficiently honest to make an explicit statement about where we stand so that others can evaluate the conclusions drawn from our evaluation studies.

### DEFINITION

By now you're probably looking for a definition of *program evaluation*. Using all the previous content in this chapter, we define the term simply as the following:

Program evaluations are systematic processes of collecting useful, ethical, culturally sensitive, valid, and reliable data about a program's

current and future interventions, outcomes, and efficiency to aid in case- and program-level decision-making in an effort for our profession to become more accountable to our stakeholder groups.

Now let's see what chapters within this book directly address the contents of this definition:

Program evaluations are systematic processes (Chapter 3) of collecting useful (Chapter 4), ethical (Chapter 5), culturally sensitive (Chapter 6), valid, and reliable data (Chapters 15–18) about a program's current (Chapter 11) and future interventions (Chapters 7–9), outcomes (Chapter 13), and efficiency (Chapter 14) to aid in case- and program-level decision making (Chapters 19 and 20) in an effort for our profession to become more accountable to our stakeholder groups (Chapter 1).

### SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the concept of the quality improvement process and explained how evaluation provides tools for us to use within that process. We discussed how evaluations can be done at the case and program levels and presented an introduction to why our profession needs evaluations: (1) to increase our knowledge base; (2) to guide decision-making for policymakers, administrators, practitioners, funders, the general public, and clients; and (3) to ensure that our clients' practice objectives are being met. We highlighted throughout the chapter that we need to work with all of our stakeholder groups when doing an evaluation so its findings will be useful not only to us—the evaluators—but to all of our stakeholder groups as well.

The chapter emphasized that we need to take into account the diversity of social work programs when doing evaluations. We discussed how accountability can be viewed from different aspects: coverage, cultural, service delivery, fiscal, legal, and professional.

We also mentioned four characteristics that program evaluators must have to be successful evaluators. The chapter ended with a definition of program evaluation.

The next chapter presents how we can use two different approaches to evaluation—the *summative* approach, sometimes called the project approach, and the *formative* approach, sometimes called the monitoring approach—in addition to the four basic types of program evaluations: need, process, outcome, and efficiency.

| Study Questions | Chapter 1 |
|---|---|

| 1 | In your own words, define "the quality improvement process" and then discuss why it's important to our profession. Present your work to the rest of your class and use their feedback to refine your material. |
|---|---|
| 2 | In your own words, define "case-level evaluations" and then discuss why they are important for the social services. Describe how you would go about doing one with a theoretical student-client you are helping with a procrastination problem; for instance, she waits until the last minute to read her program evaluation book. How would you evaluate your effectiveness with her? Present your work to the rest of your class and use their feedback to refine your material. |
| 3 | In your own words, define "program-level evaluations" and then discuss why they are important for the social services. Describe how you would go about doing one within your field placement (or work) setting. Present your work to the rest of your class and use their feedback to refine your material. |
| 4 | In your own words, discuss the relationship between case-level evaluations and program-level evaluations. Discuss how they complement one another, and provide specific social work examples from your field placement (or work setting) to illustrate your main points. |
| 5 | List and discuss the two myths that surround the concept of "evaluation." Can you think of any others? If so, what are they? |
| 6 | Discuss how contemporary social work practice integrates "art" and "evaluation." Discuss how they complement one another, and provide specific social work examples from your field placement (or work setting) to illustrate your main points. |
| 7 | List the three main roles that evaluation has within the social work profession, then discuss how each role enhances our profession's accountability. Provide specific social work examples from your field placement (or work setting) to illustrate your main points. |
| 8 | List the six stakeholder groups that we have to be accountable to, then discuss how each one contributes to an evaluation. Provide specific social work examples from your field placement (or work setting) to illustrate your main points. |
| 9 | List the six stakeholder groups for your social work program (i.e., BSW or MSW). Why did you choose them? Who is the "client" stakeholder of your BSW or MSW program? Why? Could this be your parents, who may be paying your tuition? If your parents aren't helping you out financially, are they still a stakeholder group? Why or why not? How about your instructor, your future clients, and your children or significant others? |
| 10 | Are all stakeholder groups equal when it comes to contributing to an evaluation? Why or why not? Provide specific social work examples from your field placement (or work setting) to illustrate your main points. |
| 11 | List and discuss the six forms of accountability, then provide specific social work examples from your field placement (or work setting) to illustrate your main points. |

| | **Study Questions for Chapter 1    Continued** |
|---|---|
| 12 | There are many different types of social work programs, and they vary widely in their scope (characteristics). List and then discuss the six characteristics that a program can take. Provide an example of each one from your local social work community. |
| 13 | In your own words, discuss the differences between "research" and "evaluation." Provide as many social work examples as you can to illustrate your main points. |
| 14 | What's the difference between "data (or evidence)" and "information"? Provide as many social work examples as you can to illustrate your main points. |
| 15 | List and discuss the four characteristics that social work evaluators must possess. Identify any of the characteristics that surprised you. Identify one characteristic that you think you may have trouble with as a future social work evaluator and list the ways you could grow in this area. |
| 16 | In reference to Question 15, what additional characteristics do you feel social work evaluators should have? |
| 17 | In reference to Question 15, do you feel that line-level social work practitioners should also possess these four characteristics? If so, which ones? |
| 18 | Review our definition of program evaluation. Then Google "definition: program evaluation" and locate at least five other definitions of program evaluation. Compare and contrast the ones you found with ours. What are their commonalities? What are their differences? |
| 19 | **Now the hard part:** Construct your own definition of "program evaluation" by integrating the contents of this chapter, our definition of program evaluation, and the five other ones you found on the Internet. Don't be shy; go for it! Present your definition to the rest of the class. What were their comments? Did they help you refine your definition? |

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

# APPROACHES AND TYPES OF EVALUATIONS



*"Yes, I know that it's not the grade her program evaluation professor gave on her project. She just felt like the professor was biased so she hired an external evaluator."*

As we know from the last chapter, the quality improvement process provides us with an opportunity to continually monitor our individual practices (case level) and our programs (program level) in order to enhance our entire service delivery system. We found various ways to improve our profession's accountability via the evaluation process that includes our six stakeholder groups in our evaluative efforts. This chapter continues our discussion by describing two basic approaches that can be used within program-level evaluations in addition to discussing four types of evaluations.

Let's start by describing the two general approaches to program-level evaluations:

- The summative approach, sometimes called the *project* approach
- The formative approach, sometimes called the *monitoring* approach

Figure 2.1 is a refinement of Figure 1.1 contained in the previous chapter. Note that Figure 2.1 shows only program-level evaluations; it does not show case-level evaluations.
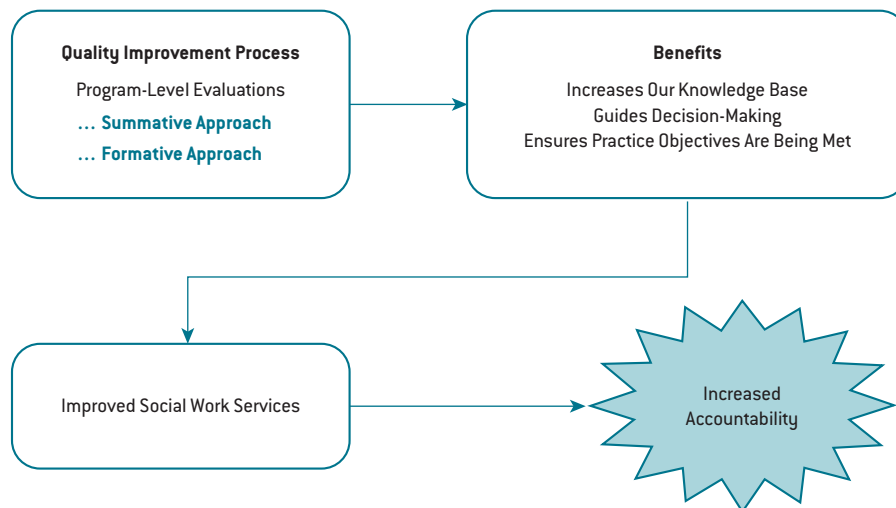
Quality Improvement Process

Program-Level Evaluations

... **Summative Approach**

... **Formative Approach**

Benefits

Increases Our Knowledge Base
Guides Decision-Making
Ensures Practice Objectives Are Being Met

Improved Social Work Services

Increased Accountability

Figure 2.1: The Continuum of Professionalization Highlighting the Two Approaches to Quality Improvement

---

**BOX 2.1  FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE EVALUATIONS**

**FORMATIVE EVALUATIONS (Monitoring Approach)**

A formative evaluation typically involves gathering data during the early stages of your program. It focuses on finding out whether your efforts are unfolding as planned; uncovering any obstacles, barriers, or unexpected opportunities that may have emerged; and identifying midcourse adjustments and corrections that can help ensure the success of your program or intervention.

Essentially, a formative evaluation is a structured way of providing program staff with additional feedback about their activities. This feedback is primarily designed to fine-tune the implementation of the intervention, and it often includes information that is only for internal use by program managers, supervisors, and line-level social workers. Some formative data may also be reported in a summative evaluation of the program.

As we know, some social work programs evolve continuously, never reaching a stage of being finished or complete; formative evaluation activities may be extended throughout the life of a program to help guide this evolution.

**SUMMATIVE EVALUATIONS (Project Approach)**

Summative evaluations typically involve the preparation of a formal report outlining the impact of a program's efforts. For instance, an evaluation report will typically detail who participated in a program, what activities affected them, and what gains or improvements resulted from their participation.

Often this report will include details regarding what conditions are essential or helpful to the replication of the program, program costs and benefits, and disaggregated results showing findings for specific subgroups of participants.

There is no crisp dividing line between a formative evaluation and a summative evaluation. Much of the data gathered during formative evaluation activities may be reported in formal summative reports, particularly during the early development of new programs, in order to show how the program is responding to challenges and reaching benchmarks and milestones along the way toward intended outcomes.

Usually a compelling case that your program has had a positive impact requires the measurement of your program objectives before, during, and after implementation of the program. This requires careful program planning and early adoption of appropriate data-collection methods and a management information database. In short, your summative evaluation report is a showcase for the client outcomes associated with your program.

An evaluation whose purpose is to assess a *completed* social work program (or project) uses a summative approach to program-level evaluations. Complementary to the summative approach, an evaluation whose purpose is to provide feedback while a program is still *under way* has a formative approach to program-level evaluations; that is, it's designed to contribute to the ongoing development and improvement of the program as it goes along. Box 2.1 on the previous page provides a brief discussion of the differences and commonalities between the two approaches to evaluation.

## THE SUMMATIVE APPROACH

The first approach to a program-level evaluation is the summative approach. It's usually initiated when the program has been in operation for a number of years. The summative approach tends to give rise to evaluations with the following general overall six characteristics:

1. Are externally driven
2. Have to deal with resistant workers
3. Are intrusive
4. Provide only periodic (or no feedback) to social workers
5. Recommend large program changes
6. Are difficult to incorporate in practice settings

### Externally Driven

A summative evaluation will almost certainly be externally driven; that is, it will be initiated by someone who is not employed within the program who—more often than not—will decide on the evaluation questions to be answered and the data to be collected that will presumably answer the evaluation questions. Social workers who are employed within the program being evaluated by an "outsider" usually have very little input into the entire evaluative process within an externally driven summative evaluation.

> The summative approach to evaluation is usually initiated when the program has been in operation for a number of years.

### Resistant Social Workers

And since social workers have very little involvement in a summative evaluation—or in the evaluation process, for that matter they may react negatively to the evaluation, seeing it as unrelated, intrusive, irrelevant, and, more important, an extra burden. Additionally, and as we know from the last chapter, they may fear the evaluation will be used in some way to judge them. When an evaluation is externally driven, social workers may resist implementation of an evaluator's recommendations, even if the program's administration insists that changes be made.

### Intrusiveness

Summative-type of evaluation procedures are very likely to be intrusive, no matter how hard the person doing the summative evaluation works to avoid this. Because the evaluation's procedures are usually not a part of a program's normal day-to-day routine but must be introduced as additional tasks to be performed, social workers have less time to spend on their normal client-related activities. This diversion of attention may be resented when workers feel obliged to spend less time with their clients and more time participating in an evaluation process that was mandated "from above" or "from outside the program."

### Periodic (or No Feedback) to Social Workers

The data obtained from a summative-type evaluation, even if shared with the social work practitioners, is usually not directly or immediately relevant to them or their current clients. This is particularly the case if an evaluation is designed to answer questions posed by administrators or funders and workers' practice concerns cannot be addressed in the same evaluation project. If, as sometimes happens, the summative-type approach does yield useful information (via the data collected) for the social workers, and changes are made

on the basis of these data, the next evaluation may not take place for a long time, perhaps not for years.

### Large Recommended Changes

The changes recommended as a result of a summative approach to evaluations can be major. Administrators and evaluators may feel that, with an evaluation occurring only once every few years, it's an event that ought to yield "significant" findings and recommendations to justify it. Large recommended changes can involve program renovations (e.g., overhauling the staff structure of a program) versus program refinements (e.g., adding or revising a component of staff training).

All evaluations must be based on well-established evaluation principles and methods. Summative evaluations, however, are more likely to be based on the scientific rigor necessary to obtain cause-and-effect knowledge and use rigorous types of evaluation designs. Usually, rigorous experiments for the purpose of increasing knowledge are carried out in laboratory-type settings and not in practice settings. However, the same rigorous conditions may be suggested if the purpose is, for example, to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of a therapy group.

The worker might argue that more time will be spent in the administration of the measuring instruments than conducting therapeutic work; the evaluator can easily reply that results will be valid only if scientific methods are strictly followed. The issue here is: Whose interests is the evaluation intended to serve? Who is it for—the social work practitioner or the external evaluator?

In a summative approach, the answer is that sometimes it serves the evaluator or the administrative, academic, or funding body that has employed the evaluator. But this is not always the case. Many summative approaches can indeed use unobtrusive evaluation methods geared to actual practice situations. If, however, the evaluation is undertaken only once in a number of years, intrusion can be considered warranted to obtain reliable and valid results.

### Difficult to Incorporate in Practice Settings

The sixth and final characteristic of the summative approach is that the methods used by the evaluator are difficult for social workers to learn and almost impossible for them to incorporate into their normal day-to-day practices. In fact, social workers are not expected to learn anything about evaluation procedures as a result of the program being evaluated. Nor is it expected that the evaluation methods employed will be used again before the next major periodic evaluation. The evaluator carries out the summative approach, and, essentially until the next time, that's that.

Most of these six characteristics of the summative approach are rather undesirable; without a doubt, the summative approach is intrusive and traumatic, fails to meet the immediate needs of workers, and may engender resentment and fear—especially if a program's workers have never been involved in a previous evaluation.

We now turn to a second approach to program-level evaluations that complements the summative approach and is the main focus of our book—the formative approach.

## THE FORMATIVE APPROACH

The formative approach is based on reliable and valid evaluation methods that can be integrated into a social work program as a part of—not in addition to—its normal operating routine. This approach measures the extent that a program is reaching its intended population and the extent to which its services match those that were intended to be delivered. In addition, this approach is designed to provide immediate and continuous feedback on the effectiveness of the client services being offered.

The formative approach is nothing more than the continual collection, analysis, reporting, and use of client-centered data. This ongoing and dynamic approach to evaluation is planned, systematic, and, most important, timely. Ideally, such a system would be integrated with the program's recordkeeping system to avoid duplication and enhance efficiency (see Chapter 19 on data-information systems).

For example, data on the changes the program aims to effect (called program objectives—see Chapters 7 and 8) can be collected at intake, at

specified times during the intervention (treatment), at termination, and at follow-up. In this way, a constant stream of systematic data is collected, analyzed, and reported in an effort to help the program focus on its clients as they come into (intake), go through (treatment), and leave (termination) the program, then go on with their lives (follow-up).

> The formative approach to evaluation is based on reliable and valid evaluation methods that can be integrated into a social work program as a part of—not in addition to—its normal operating routine.

As previously noted, the formative approach is done by folks who are employed within the program whereas the summative approach is usually done by people who are hired outside the program. However, this is only a generality and does not hold for large social service organizations, especially those with research and evaluation departments actually housed within them. Nevertheless, it's important to think through the evaluator's role regardless of where the evaluator is housed—within the organization or outside the organization.

### Advantages of the Formative Approach

Social workers who are interested in improving the quality of the services they offer via evaluations are well on their way to taking responsibility for providing the best possible service to clients through systematic examinations of their strengths and weaknesses via the quality improvement process. Becoming a self-evaluating social work professional (or program) has definite advantages not only for clients but also for workers. For example, the formative approach to evaluation:

1. Provides an increase understanding of programs
2. Provides relevant feedback
3. Provides timely feedback
4. Provides self-protection
5. Has a high level of practitioner and client satisfaction
6. Strives for professionalism

*Provides an Increased Understanding of Programs*

As you know by now from your social work educational experience, social work programs are often complex entities with many interlinked components. Practitioners' main concerns usually have to do with the effectiveness of their treatment interventions. How can the confused sexual identity of an adolescent who has been sexually abused best be addressed? What teaching technique is most effective with children who have learning disabilities? Is an open-door policy appropriate for group homes housing adolescents who are mentally challenged? Answers come slowly through study, intuition, hunches, and past experience, but often the issues are so complex that practitioners cannot be sure if the answers obtained are correct.

Many social workers stumble onward, hoping their interventions are right, using intuition to assess the effectiveness of their particular interventions (or package of interventions) with a particular client. We briefly discuss case-level evaluations in Chapters 19 and 20 to show how the use of simple single-subject evaluation designs can complement a worker's intuition so that an inspired guess more closely approaches knowledge.

However, no amount of knowledge about how well an intervention worked will tell the worker why it worked or failed to work. Why do apparently similar clients, treated similarly, achieve different results? Is it something about the client, the worker, or the type of intervention?

It's always difficult to pinpoint a reason for failure to meet a program's objectives because there are so many possible overlapping and intertwined causes. However, some reasons may be identified by a careful look at the program stages leading up to the interventions. For example, one reason for not attaining success with clients may be because they were inappropriate for a certain program and/or client group in the first place. Or perhaps the program's assessment procedures were inadequate; perhaps unsuitable clients were accepted because the referral came from a major funding body. In other words, perhaps the lack of client success at the intervention stage derives from simple screening problems at intake.

Social workers who have been involved with a do-it-yourself evaluation may become familiar with the program's intake procedures, both in theory and in reality. They may also become familiar with the planning procedures, discharge procedures, follow-up procedures, staff recruitment and training procedures, recording procedures, and so on.

The worker will begin to see a link between poor client outcomes at one program stage and inadequacies at another, between a success here and an innovation somewhere else. In sum, practitioners may be able to perform their own tasks more effectively if they understand how their program functions as a living organism. One way to gain this understanding is to participate in a hands-on, do-it-yourself evaluation.

### Provides Relevant Feedback

A second advantage of the formative approach is that the workers within the program can formulate meaningful and relevant evaluation questions. They can use evaluation procedures to find out what they want to know, not what the administrator, the funder, or a university professor wants to know. If the data to be gathered are perceived as relevant, social workers are usually willing to cooperate in the evaluative effort. And if the information resulting from that data is relevant, it's likely to be used by the practitioners.

We believe that all evaluative efforts conducted in our profession provide feedback loops that improve the delivery of services. Feedback provides data about the extent to which a program's objective is achieved or approximated. Based on these data, client services may be adjusted or changed to improve the achievement of that objective.

A third advantage is that the workers can decide when the evaluation is to be carried out. Evaluation procedures can be undertaken daily, weekly, monthly, or only once in 5 years, as is discussed in the following chapters. The point here is that data are most useful when they help to solve a current problem, less useful when the problem has not yet occurred, and least useful after the event.

Some activities in a social work program need to be monitored on a continuing basis. For example, client referrals are received daily and must be

processed quickly. To estimate remaining program space, intake workers need a list of how many clients are being served, how many clients will be discharged shortly, and how many clients have recently been accepted into the program. This continually changing list is an example of a simple evaluative tool that provides useful data. The resulting information can be used to compare the actual number of clients in the program with the number the program was originally designed (and usually funded) to serve. In other words, the list can be used to fulfill a basic evaluative purpose: comparison of what is with what should be, of the actual with the ideal.

It might be found, in some programs, that the arithmetic of intake is not quite right. For example, suppose that a program has space for a hundred clients. At the moment, seventy are being served on a regular basis. In theory, then, the program can accept thirty more clients. Suppose also that the program has five social workers; each will then theoretically carry a maximum caseload of twenty. In the caseloads of these five workers there should be just thirty spaces, but for some reason, there are more than thirty. The supervisor, who is trying to assign new clients to workers, discovers that the workers can muster forty spaces between them. In other words, there are ten clients on the computer who are theoretically being served but who are not in any of the five workers' caseloads. What has happened to these ten clients?

Investigation brings to light that the workers' records and the computer's records are kept in different ways. Computer records reflect the assumption that every client accepted will continue to be served until formally discharged. However, the practitioner who has not seen Ms. Smith for 6 months and has failed to locate her after repeated tries has placed Ms. Smith in the "inactive" file. The result of this disparity in recordkeeping is that the program seems to have fewer available spaces, and clients who might be served are being turned away.

Simply discussing inactive files at a staff meeting might solve the problem. What steps will be taken to locate a client who does not appear for appointments? How long should attempts at contact continue before the client is formally discharged? Which other

involved professionals need to be informed about the client's nonappearance and the discharge? When and how should they be informed? Is it worth modifying the intake computer's terminal display to include inactive files, with the dates they became inactive and the dates they were reactivated or discharged? Once decisions have been made on these points, a straightforward procedure can be put in place to deal with the ongoing problem of inactive files.

### Provides Self-Protection

Some social work programs are eventually evaluated by outside evaluators. If the social workers have already familiarized themselves with evaluation procedures and with their program's strengths and weaknesses, they are in a better position to defend the program when an externally driven evaluation occurs. In addition, because improvements have already been made as a result of self-evaluations, their program will be more defensible. Also, the social workers will indirectly learn about evaluation designs and methodology by formatively evaluating their practices on a regular basis. Modifications recommended by an outside evaluator are hence likely to be less far-reaching and less traumatic.

> Evaluations should not be new and frightening experiences but should simply be a part of the routine—a routine that tries to improve the quality of services for clients.

Another consideration is that the social workers themselves are likely to be less traumatized by the idea of being evaluated: Evaluation is no longer a new and frightening experience but simply a part of the routine—a routine that tries to improve the quality of services for clients.

### Has a High Level of Practitioner and Client Satisfaction

A formative approach to a case-level evaluation can satisfy the worker that an intervention is appropriate and successful, and it can improve a client's morale by demonstrating the progress that has been made toward his or her objectives. Moreover, data gathered at the case level are always used at the program level. Thus, improvement of the program as a whole can follow from an improvement in one worker's practice—one client at a time.

A formative approach is consistent with the expectations of professional conduct in social work. Social workers who use systematic methods to evaluate their work can benefit from evaluation results through informed decision-making. Evaluation results can be used to support critical program changes or defend controversial program actions. They can also confirm or challenge workers' long-held beliefs about a mode of operation. An evaluation can also reveal a program's flaws and deficiencies that require corrective action.

## FOUR TYPES OF EVALUATIONS

There are many types of evaluations that can be done to improve the delivery of the services we offer our clients. We briefly present the four basic types that are most relevant to our profession. Each is expanded on in the chapters contained in Part IV of this book:

1. Determining client needs (Chapter 11)
2. Assessing how a program works (Chapter 12)
3. Assessing client outcomes (Chapter 13)
4. Determining a program's efficiency (Chapter 14)

Figure 2.2 on the following page illustrates these four types of evaluations.

### Needs Assessment

As we will see in Chapter 11, the first type of evaluation is needs assessment or "the assessment of need." These evaluations usually take place before a program is conceptualized, funded, staffed, and implemented (the topic of Chapters 7 and 8). In short, a needs assessment assesses the feasibility of (or need for) a given social service. A needs assessment is intended to verify that a social problem exists within a specific client population to an extent that warrants the implementation of a program.

**Quality Improvement Process**

**Needs Assessments**
**Process Evaluations**
**Outcome Evaluations**
**Efficiency Evaluations**

**Benefits**

Increases Our Knowledge Base
Guides Decision-Making
Ensures Practice Objectives Are Being Met

Improved Social Work Services
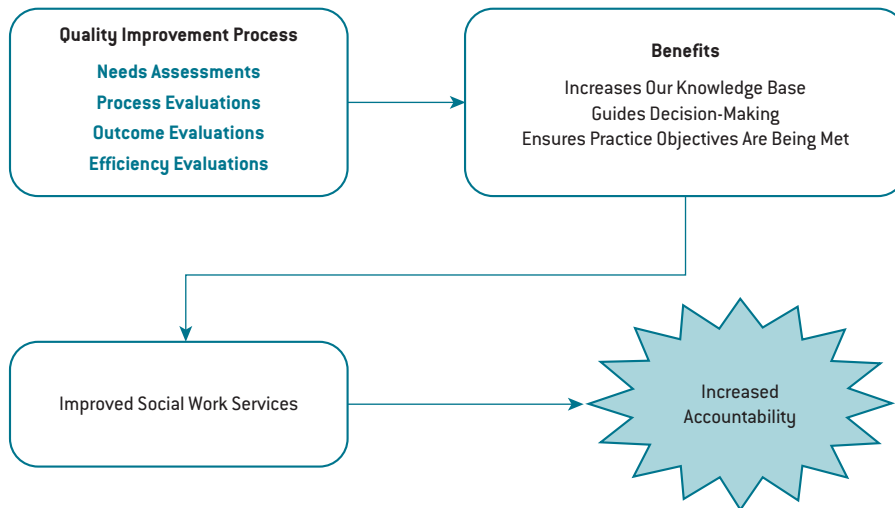
Increased
Accountability

Figure 2.2: The Continuum of Professionalization Highlighting the Four Most Common Types of Evaluations That Can Be Used within the Quality Improvement Process

To do this, a needs assessment must produce fairly precise estimates of the demographic characteristics of individuals exhibiting the problem believed to exist. A needs assessment seeks to answer such questions as:

- What is the socioeconomic profile of the community?
- What are the particular needs of this community with respect to the type of program being considered (e.g., physical health, mental health, employment, education, crime prevention)?
- What kinds of service are likely to be attractive to this particular community?
- Is the program meeting the needs of the people it believes it's serving?
- Is the program meeting the needs of people in the best possible way?
- Are there any other needs that the program could be meeting?

Social work programs should never gather data to justify their own maintenance needs. They must collect data to ascertain the real needs of the people they hope to serve and then tailor the structure of their service delivery to meet these needs.

As mentioned, an evaluation does not necessarily assess a whole program; particular parts of a program may be the focus, as in a needs assessment. For example, there may be some doubt that a program is currently addressing a specific community's needs. The composition of the local community may have changed since the program was first established, and there may now be a high proportion of Latino children being referred for service, whereas before the majority of referrals were African American and Caucasian.

The goal of a needs assessment may be to determine to what degree the program is responsive to the special needs of Latino children and to the present concerns of the Latino community. This may involve conducting a needs assessment within the community and comparing the community's current perceived needs with the program's original intent.

Experienced program executive directors and their funding sources know that the demographic characteristics of communities tend to change over time. Perhaps there's now a higher proportion of senior citizens than formerly, or perhaps the closure of a large manufacturing plant has meant high unemployment and an increase in all of the problems associated with job loss. Changes may also have occurred in the community's social

service delivery network. Perhaps a program for pregnant teens has had to close its doors or a meals-on-wheels service has recently been instituted for homebound seniors. Perceptive program directors try to keep abreast of changes like these by becoming members of interagency committees, consulting with local advisory boards and funding sources, establishing contact with community organizations, talking with social work professors, and taking other similar actions.

> Needs assessment usually takes place before a program is conceptualized, funded, staffed, and implemented.

Despite all such preemptive measures, however, there is occasionally some doubt that a program is meeting the current needs of the people it was originally funded to serve. On these occasions, a needs assessment may be an appropriate type of evaluation, as it can ascertain what the community currently needs (if any) in the way of social services.

It's possible to avoid periodic and disruptive evaluative efforts if a program's responsiveness to its community needs is continually monitored. Indications that a target population is changing can be seen in changing referral patterns, novel problem situations presented by clients, and unusual requests from other programs.

We believe all programs should have formative systems through which such data are routinely collected and analyzed so that any lack of responsiveness to a community's needs can be easily picked up and dealt with immediately. We return to needs assessments in much more detail in Chapter 11.

### Process Evaluations

A second type of evaluation is a process evaluation, which is discussed in depth in Chapter 12. A process analysis is the monitoring and measurement of a treatment intervention—the assumed cause of client success or failure. As we will see shortly, an evaluation of efficiency determines the ratio of effectiveness or outcome to cost but says nothing about why the program is or is not efficient, either overall or in certain areas. To answer that question, we need to consider program process: the entire sequence of activities that a program undertakes to achieve its objectives, including all the decisions made, who made them, and on what criteria they were based.

An evaluation of process might include the sequence of events throughout the entire program, or it might focus on a particular program component: intervention, say, or follow-up. A careful examination of how something is done may indicate why it's more or less effective or efficient. To state the point another way: When a program is planned correctly (Chapters 7 and 8), it should define the population it serves, specify the client needs it will meet, and describe the specific social work interventions it will undertake to meet the client needs within the population. If client needs are not being met, or the population is not being adequately served, perhaps the practitioners' activities are not being carried out as originally planned. A process evaluation can ascertain whether this is so.

Sometimes a needs assessment will have determined that the program is serving a sufficient number of the people it's meant to serve. If not, a process evaluation will determine this and will also determine exactly what treatment interventions (activities) are being undertaken by its social workers with their clients. It addresses such questions as:

- What procedures are in place for assessment?
- Are staff members who do assessments thoroughly trained for the job?
- What modes of therapy are offered?
- What criteria are used to decide when a client should move from individual to family therapy, or into group therapy, or should be discharged or referred elsewhere?
- What follow-up procedures are in place?
- How much and what type of staff training is available?
- How are client records kept?
- What do staff do compared with what they are supposed to do?

For a process evaluation to occur, however, the program has to be specifically delineated in a

written form that makes it extremely clear how a client goes through the entire program. In short, a client path flow must be established that depicts the key activities, decision points, and client flow through the program in a graphic format. We need to construct a logic model of our program and present a detailed diagram, sometimes called a client path flow, of the chronological order of how a client comes into and goes through our program. Logic models and client path flows are introduced in the following chapter and discussed in depth in Chapters 7 and 8.

> Process evaluations describe and assess the services provided to clients and how satisfied key stakeholders are with the services provided.

The data necessary for a process evaluation will generally be available within the program itself but rarely in usable form. Client demographic and assessment data may be on file but will probably not be summarized. Services provided to clients are typically recorded by social workers in handwritten notes deposited in client files. Training courses taken by staff may be included in staff files or general training files or may not be recorded at all.

Where no systematic management data system (sometimes referred to as a management information system) is in place (see Chapter 19), gathering, summarizing, and analyzing data are extremely time-consuming endeavors. As a result, it's rarely done until someone outside the program insists on it. Again, the use of routine formative procedures will avoid the need for intrusive evaluations initiated by outside sources.

We have assumed that both outcome and process evaluations are necessary components of any comprehensive program evaluation. If, however, we are concerned only with the client outcome of a specific program, we might ask why we need to monitor the program's implementation. The answer is simple: An outcome analysis investigates any changes that are believed to be brought about by an orderly set of program activities. We cannot be certain, however, that any change was caused by the program's activities unless we know precisely what these activities were. Therefore, we need to study the program operations via process evaluations.

### Outcome Evaluations

As we will see in Chapter 13, a third type of evaluation is an outcome evaluation. This evaluation determines to what degree the program is meeting its overall program objectives. In a treatment program, this usually means the degree to which treatment interventions are effective. For example, a program in which a high proportion of clients achieve their individual practice objectives (sometimes referred to as treatment objectives or client objectives) can be considered successful. If the majority of clients terminate unilaterally without fully reaching their practice objectives, the program can be considered less than successful.

> An outcome evaluation is the systematic collection of data to assess the impact of a program, present conclusions about its merit or worth, and make recommendations about future program direction or improvement.

An outcome evaluation indicates whether the program is working, but it says nothing about why it's working (or failing to work). Nor is there any mention of efficiency; that is, the time and dollar cost of client success. After all, if a program achieves what it's supposed to achieve, via the attainment of its program objectives, what does it matter how it achieves it? If the program is to be replicated or even improved, it does matter; nevertheless, client outcome alone is the focus of many outcome assessments. Questions related to outcome generally fall into four categories:

1. To what degree is the program achieving its program objectives? For example, do people who participate in a vocational training program have improved job skills, and by

how much have their job skills improved (a program objective)?

2. Do people who have been through the program have better job skills than similar people who have been through similar programs?

3. Highly related to the previous point is the question of causality: Is there any evidence that the program caused the improved job skills?

4. How long does the improvement last? Many clients who are discharged from social service programs return to the exact same environment that was more than likely responsible for their problem in the first place. Often client gains are not maintained, and equally often programs have no follow-up procedures to find out if they in fact have been maintained.

As we will see throughout this book, questions about how well the program achieves its objectives can be answered by aggregating, or bringing to-gether, the data that individual social workers collect about their individual clients. Questions about how well client success is maintained can be answered in a similar way. However, comparisons between those who have and those who have not been through the program, as well as questions about causality, require a different sort of data, collected via explanatory evaluation designs involving two or more groups of clients.

### Efficiency Evaluations

Chapter 14 describes efficiency evaluations, the fourth type of evaluation. These types of evaluations are always money-oriented and address such questions as:

- How many hours of therapy are generally required before clients reach their practice objectives?
- What do these hours cost in clinical and administrative time, facilities, equipment, and other resources?

- Is there any way in which cost could be reduced without loss of effectiveness, perhaps by offering group therapy instead of individual therapy?
- Is a particular program process—intake, say—conducted in the shortest possible time, at minimum cost?

If an outcome evaluation has shown the program to be effective in achieving its program objectives, the efficiency questions become:

- Does the program achieve its success at a reasonable cost?
- Can dollar values be assigned to the outcomes it achieves?
- Does the program cost less or more than other similar programs obtaining similar results?

Efficiency evaluations are particularly difficult to carry out in social work because so many of our client outcomes cannot be realistically (socially and professionally) measured in terms of dollars. In fact, it would be unthinkable to measure some client outcomes in terms of efficiency (e.g., counseling terminally ill cancer patients). On the other hand, the benefits of a job-training program that removes its clients from welfare rolls can be more easily quantified in terms of efficiency (cost savings) than a program designed to reduce hopelessness in ter-minal cancer patients. Nevertheless, there is only so much money available for social service programs, and decisions regarding which ones to fund, no matter how difficult, have to be made—especially if funding decisions are made based on efficiency criteria. We do not need to put a price on program results in order to use costs in decision-making, but it's necessary to be able to describe in detail what results have been achieved via the expenditure of what resources.

> An efficiency evaluation determines the ratio of a program's effectiveness or outcome to cost; it does not explain why a program is or is not efficient.

## INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EVALUATIONS

Each of the four types of evaluations we mentioned can be done by an internal and/or external evaluator. In short, any evaluation may be internally driven; that is, they are initiated and conducted by staff members who work within a program. In other cases, the evaluation may be externally driven—initiated by someone outside the program to be evaluated, often a funding source.

The main motive behind internal evaluations is usually to improve the quality of services to clients immediately. A distinct advantage of internal evaluations is that the evaluation questions framed are likely to be highly relevant to staff members' interests. This is hardly surprising; staff members are responsible for conducting the evaluation, and, with their firsthand knowledge of the program, they are in a position to ensure that the evaluation addresses relevant issues. Thus, feedback from an evaluation nurtures the quality improvement process. Moreover, practitioners

(or organizations) who continually evaluate their practices are in a position to demonstrate accountability to their funders and other stakeholders.

A drawback to internal evaluators is that they may be viewed as lacking the credibility that comes with independent, outside evaluations. Sometimes, therefore, funding bodies are not content with data from internal evaluations and request external ones. Because they are carried out independently of the programs to be evaluated, external evaluations are often perceived to be more credible.

Because they are commissioned by people outside our programs, however, they tend to reflect those interests and may not address questions that are most relevant to program staff. Outside evaluators often impose an onerous data-collection burden on staff and tend to be disruptive to normal program operations.

Box 2.2 briefly delineates the skill set external evaluators should possess. Obviously, you too should have these skills if you're going to do an evaluation within your own program.

---

### BOX 2.2  HIRING AN EXTERNAL EVALUATOR?

The information is this box will assist you with preparations in hiring an external evaluator—if you need one, that is. It should be particularly useful for social work agencies that do not have specific position descriptions tailored for evaluators. This box is organized around the six steps of the evaluation process as outlined in the next chapter, Chapter 3. It lists some of the knowledge, skills, and abilities an evaluator needs to possess for each step of the evaluation process as illustrated in Figure 3.1 in Chapter 3.

In this list we will not address formal educational requirements. Evaluation practitioners come from many academic disciplines, and many evaluators have learned the field by experience rather than formal educational programs.

This list is not all-inclusive; in other words, these are not the only appropriate attributes to look for in an external evaluator. And although you probably won't find an evaluator who has all of these skills, you should look for someone with many of these skills and a willingness to learn those skills he or she doesn't currently possess. Our main goal is to provide you with useful guidance for your consideration.

#### PRINCIPAL DUTIES

- Work with stakeholders to develop a comprehensive program evaluation plan.
- Ensure that the evaluation activities are complementary to the program's operations and activities in addition to being consistent with its mission statement.

#### KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ABILITIES

*Overarching Items*

- Knowledge of or familiarity with the evaluation framework as presented in this book
- Working knowledge of the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation's program evaluation standards (i.e., utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy)
- Knowledge of or familiarity with the American Evaluation Association's Guiding Principles for Evaluators (http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=105)
- Ability to identify limitations of knowledge and methods for acquiring additional evaluation knowledge to supplement personal expertise when necessary
- Knowledge of how evaluation is different from research

**BOX 2.2  CONTINUED**

*Step 1: Engage Stakeholders*

- Ability to educate program staff and partners about evaluation concepts and methods
- Ability to engage stakeholders based on shared priorities:
  – Meeting facilitation, presentation, conflict resolution, and negotiation skills
  – Knowledge of strategies to engage stakeholders in the evaluation process
- Ability to work as part of an evaluation team to plan and execute evaluations of prioritized aspects of the program

*Step 2: Describe the Program*

- Ability to organize and summarize information in a clear and concise manner
- Ability to understand the context of a program and how it affects program planning, implementation, and outcomes
- Ability or experience in the development and use of logic models to describe programs
- Ability to provide leadership in a team setting, move members forward, and build consensus
- Skill in developing and articulating program goals and objectives (i.e., SMART objectives as discussed in Chapter 7)

*Step 3: Focus the Evaluation Design*

- Knowledge of various evaluation designs (e.g., exploratory, descriptive, explanatory)
- Experience with evaluations using mixed-methods research approaches
- Knowledge or experience with approaches for generating, revising, and prioritizing evaluation questions
- Knowledge in the development of evaluation plans
- Knowledge of methods for designing evaluations so as to increase the likelihood that the findings will be used by primary evaluation stakeholders

*Step 4: Gather Credible Evidence (or Data)*

- Ability to lead the program's staff in developing and testing data-collection instruments

- Ability to identify and assess existing data sources for their potential use in a program evaluation
- Ability to gather data using qualitative and quantitative approaches such as interviews, group processes, participant observation, surveys, electronic data files, or other methods
- Ability to manage databases, construct data files, conduct and supervise data entry, and perform data edits/cleaning
- Knowledge of methods for protecting confidential data

*Step 5: Justify Conclusions*

- Knowledge of appropriate quantitative and qualitative data-analysis methods
- Ability to conduct analyses using appropriate analytic tools for quantitative data (e.g., SAS, SPSS, Minitab) and/or qualitative data (e.g., NVivo 8, Atlas.ti, MaxQDA)
- Ability to develop criteria and standards reflective of the values held by key evaluation stakeholders
- Experience with synthesizing information generated through an evaluation to produce findings that are clearly linked to the data collected
- Skill in working with stakeholders to develop feasible recommendations

*Step 6: Ensure Use and Share Lessons Learned*

- Ability to prepare and present evaluation results in a manner that increases the likelihood that they will be used and accepted by a diverse group of stakeholders
- Ability to develop action plans and systems to facilitate and track implementation of evaluation findings and recommendations
- Ability to work with stakeholders to present analyses, find common themes, and identify relevant and actionable findings from evaluations
- Skill in developing and implementing a communications and dissemination plan

When externally driven evaluations are to occur, organizations that conduct internal evaluations are in an advantageous position. A priori, internal evaluations may identify some things that need to be improved before the outside evaluators appear. They may also identify program strengths, which can be displayed. Staff members are likely to be conversant with evaluation matters, allowing them to engage in knowledgeable discussions with outside evaluators and thus help ensure that the evaluation process will deal fairly with the program's interests.

## SUMMARY

This chapter started with an introduction to two common approaches to program-level evaluations: the summative approach and the formative approach. We then summarized the four types of evaluations that will be presented in depth in the chapters in Part IV: need, process, outcome, and efficiency. We ended the chapter by introducing the concept of internal and external evaluations.

With the contents of the previous chapter and this one under your belt, you're in an excellent position to appreciate the process that all evaluations go through—the content of the following chapter, which is aptly titled "The Evaluation Process."

| | Study Questions | Chapter 2 |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Discuss how the formative approach to program-level evaluations generates data for a summative approach. Describe how this could be done within your field placement (or work) setting. | |
| 2 | List and then discuss each of the characteristics of the summative approach to evaluations. Then discuss how each is relevant by providing specific social work examples from your field placement (or work setting) to illustrate your main points. | |
| 3 | List and then discuss each of the advantages of the formative approach to evaluations. Then discuss how each is relevant by providing specific social work examples from your field placement (or work setting) to illustrate your main points. | |
| 4 | List the four main types of program evaluations. In your own words, briefly describe what each does. Then discuss how each could be done within your field placement (or work setting). | |
| 5 | What questions do needs assessments address? Provide specific social work examples from your field placement (or work setting) to illustrate your main points. | |
| 6 | What questions do process evaluations address? Provide specific social work examples from your field placement (or work setting) to illustrate your main points. | |
| 7 | What questions do outcome evaluations address? Provide specific social work examples from your field placement (or work setting) to illustrate your main points. | |
| 8 | What questions do efficiency evaluations address? Provide specific social work examples from your field placement (or work setting) to illustrate your main points. | |
| 9 | In your own words, discuss the differences between internal and external evaluations. Then discuss how an internal one could be done within your field placement (or work setting). | |

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

# THE EVALUATION PROCESS



TOPIC FOR THIS WEEK:
Learning how to make the evaluation
process transparent for all stakeholders

*"No, no—describing the program evaluation process with crystal-clear clarity shouldn't be the underlying goal of your term paper. If you write a paper that's too easy to read and follow, everyone will know what it's all about."*

The previous two chapters presented the rationale for how case- and program-level evaluations help us to become more accountable to society. As you know, our programs are extremely complex and dynamic organizations that have numerous outside pressures to attend to, as well as concentrating on their own internal struggles—all at the same time providing efficient and effective services to clients.

Not only do program evaluations (i.e., need, process, outcome, efficiency) bring us a step closer to accountability; they also help line-level workers and evaluators alike learn about our clients' life experiences, witness client suffering, observe client

progress and regress, and feel the public's pressure to produce totally unrealistic "magnificent and instant positive change" with extremely limited resources.

Integrating evaluation activities into our program's service delivery system, therefore, presents an immense opportunity for us to learn more about social problems, the people they affect, and how our interventions actually work. For organizational learning to occur, however, there must be an opportunity for continuous, meaningful, and useful evaluative feedback. And this feedback must make sense to all of our stakeholder groups.

All levels of staff within a program have an influence on the program's growth and development, so they all must be involved in the "evaluative processes" as well. Within this spirit, we now turn our attention to the evaluative process.

## THE EVALUATION PROCESS

What's this "evaluative process," you ask? The answer is simple. It's a tried-and-true method that contains six general steps as presented in Figure 3.1. As with the previous editions of this book, the steps and all related text have been adopted and modified from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC; 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2005, 2006, 2010, 2011, 2013); Milstein, Wetterhall, and CDC Evaluation Working Group (2000); and Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, and Caruthers (2011).

The following is a brief description of each step illustrated in Figure 3.1. It's very important to remember that the steps are all dependent on one another and, more often than not, are executed in a nonlinear sequence. An order exists, however, for fulfilling each step—earlier steps provide the foundation for subsequent steps.

Now that we know that there are six steps in the program evaluation process, we now turn our attention to describing each one of them in greater detail. Let's be pragmatic and start with the first step: engaging your stakeholders in the evaluative process.
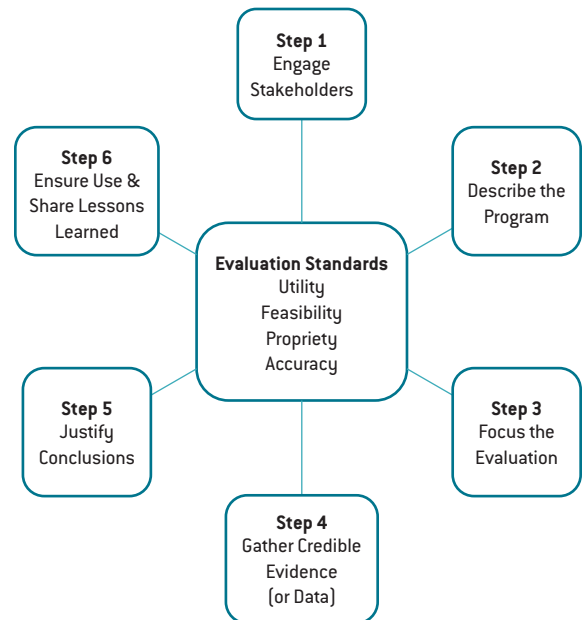


Figure  3.1:  The Program Evaluation Process

## STEP 1: ENGAGE THE STAKEHOLDERS

As we know from the previous two chapters, evaluation stakeholders are people or organizations that are invested in your program, are interested in the results of your evaluation, and/or have a stake in what will be done with evaluation results. Representing their needs and interests throughout the process is fundamental to a good program evaluation.

For all four types of evaluations mentioned in the previous chapter and presented in depth in Part IV of this book, the evaluation cycle begins by engaging all of our stakeholder groups. As we know by now, almost all social work evaluations involve partnerships with and among its stakeholders; therefore, any evaluation of a program requires considering the value systems of the various stakeholder groups.

You must engage your program's stakeholders before you do anyone of the four types of evaluations: need, process, outcome, efficiency.

As you know from the previous two chapters, your stakeholders must be totally engaged in the evaluation of your program in order to ensure that their perspectives are understood, appreciated, and, more important, heard. We simply cannot overemphasize this point enough—if you don't include your stakeholders in an evaluation it will fail. Guaranteed! Representing their needs and interests throughout the process is fundamental to doing a good program evaluation.

When stakeholders are not engaged, your evaluation findings can easily be ignored, criticized, or resisted because your evaluation doesn't address your stakeholders' individual evaluation questions or values. After becoming involved, stakeholders can easily help to execute the other five steps.

### Why Stakeholders Are Important to an Evaluation

Stakeholders can help (or hinder) an evaluation before it's even conducted, while it's being conducted, and after the results are collected and ready for use. Because so many of our social service efforts are complex and because our programs may be several layers removed from frontline implementation, stakeholders take on a particular importance in ensuring meaningful evaluation questions are identified and your evaluation results will be used to make a difference. Stakeholders are much more likely to support your evaluation and act on the results and recommendations if they are involved in the evaluation process.

You need to identify those stakeholders who matter the most by giving priority to those stakeholders who:

- Can increase the credibility of your efforts or the evaluation process itself
- Are responsible for day-to-day implementation of the activities that are part of your social work program
- Will advocate for (or authorize changes to) your program that the evaluation may recommend
- Will fund or authorize the continuation or expansion of your program

### The Role of Stakeholders in an Evaluation

Stakeholder perspectives should influence every step of your evaluation. Stakeholder input in Step 2 (Describe the Program) ensures a clear and consensual understanding of your program's activities and outcomes. This is an important backdrop for even more valuable stakeholder input in Step 3 (Focus the Evaluation) to ensure that the key questions of most importance are included.

Stakeholders may also have insights or preferences on the most effective and appropriate ways to collect data from target respondents. In Step 5 (Justify Conclusions), the perspectives and values that stakeholders bring to your project are explicitly acknowledged and honored in making judgments about the data gathered.

> The product of Step 1 is to form a list of stakeholders to engage in your evaluation and provide a clear rationale for each one's involvement.

Finally, the considerable time and effort you spent in engaging and building consensus among stakeholders pays off in the last step, Step 6 (Ensure Use and Share Lessons Learned), because stakeholder engagement has created a market for the evaluation's results, or findings.

Stakeholders can be involved in your evaluation at various levels. For example, you may want to include coalition members on an evaluation team and engage them in developing relevant evaluation questions, data-collection procedures, and data analyses. Or consider ways to assess your partners' needs and interests in the evaluation, and develop means of keeping them informed of its progress and integrating their ideas into evaluation activities. Again, stakeholders are more likely to support your evaluation and act on its results and recommendations if they are involved in the evaluation process from the get-go.

Be sure to include critics of your program! Have you ever heard the phrase, "keep your friends close and your enemies closer"? Well, this slogan aptly applies to the evaluation process as well. It's very important for you to engage your program's critics in

your evaluation. Critics will help you to identify issues around your program's strategies and evaluation data that could be attacked or discredited, thus helping you strengthen the evaluation process.

This information might also help you and others understand the opposition's rationale and will help you engage potential agents of change within the opposition. However, use caution: It's important to understand the motives of the opposition before engaging them in any meaningful way.

> If you don't include your stakeholders in an evaluation it will fail. 100% guaranteed.

The emphasis on engaging stakeholders mirrors the increasing prominence of participatory models or "action" research in the research/evaluation community. A participatory approach combines systematic inquiry with the collaboration of diverse stakeholders to meet specific needs and to contend with broad issues of equity and justice.

### Skill Sets You Need to Engage Stakeholders (Skills 1–3)

Engaging stakeholders for an evaluation is an easy task. Right? Wrong. It takes a lot of hard work where you will use most of the social work skills you learned about in your practice courses (e.g., active listening, clarification of content, expression of content). Below are three basic skills you need to engage stakeholders for any one of the four types of evaluations:

1. Ability to educate program staff and partners about evaluation concepts and methods (see entire book)
2. Ability to engage stakeholders based on shared priorities (see Chapters 1 and 2):
   - Meeting facilitation, presentation, conflict resolution, and negotiation skills
   - Knowledge of strategies to engage stakeholders in the evaluation process
3. Ability to work as part of an evaluation team to plan and execute evaluations of prioritized aspects of the program (see Chapters 1 and 2)

## STEP 2: DESCRIBE THE PROGRAM

Writing a clear description of your program sets the frame of reference for all subsequent decisions in the evaluation process. Your description enables comparisons with similar programs and facilitates attempts to connect your program's components to its intended outcomes. Moreover, your stakeholders might have differing ideas regarding your program's overall goal and objectives. Evaluations done without agreement on your program description will be worthless.

A comprehensive program description clarifies the need for your program, the activities you are undertaking to address this need, and your program's intended outcomes. This can help you when it's time to focus your evaluation on a limited set of questions of central importance. Note that in this step you are describing your program and not the evaluation. Various tools (e.g., theory of change and logic models, to be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8) will be introduced to help you depict your program and the anticipated outcomes. Such models can help stakeholders reach a shared understanding of your program.

### Logic Models

Your evaluation plan must include a logic model for your program as a whole. When developing your evaluation plan, it's important to develop a logic model that specifically describes what you propose to evaluate. Simply put, the product of this step is a logic model of what is being evaluated, which must be accompanied by a text-based description.

> The product of Step 2 is the creation of a logic model accompanied by a text-based description.

Such descriptions are invaluable not only for your own records but also for others who might be interested in implementing activities similar to those contained in your program. With a clear description of the activity and context in which your program resides, other social service programs will be better