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# Project Evaluation

Planning & Resources

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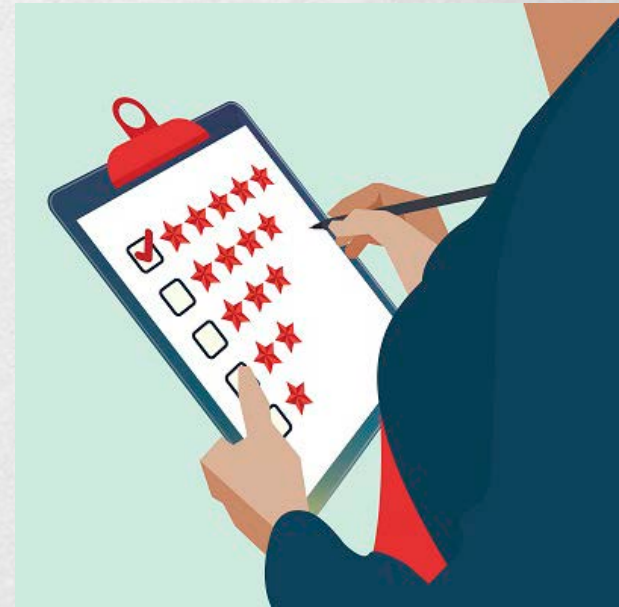
Office of Research & Economic Development

Seminar Series

November 13, 2019

# Today We Will Discuss:

- Why do we evaluate?
- Planning for project evaluation
  - Parallel planning: proposal and evaluation development
  - Parts of your evaluation plan
- Selecting an evaluator
- Tools and resources



# Why Do We Evaluate?

- Evaluation is a tool of good management and quality improvement – gives insight into effective strategies on how to improve performance and measures the success or impact the program is making.
  - **Formative (process) evaluation** provides feedback along the way and facilitates day-to-day decision making.
  - **Summative (product) evaluation** measure program attainments, including the outcome of the project and achievement of stated goals.
- To establish model programs and best practices by providing feedback about what worked and what failed – prevents confirmation bias.

# Why Do We Evaluate?

- Funding agencies highly stress the importance of proper assessment of the achievement of project goals and objectives – Are you (and to what extent are you) doing what you said you would do?
- Evaluation is part of required project and performance reporting for most funding agencies. Evaluation measures should be linked to project goals and objectives for consistency.
- For some agencies, evaluation is tied to special criteria or "priorities" (i.e. absolute priorities, competitive priorities, invitational, etc.)

# What is Program Evaluation?

- **Evaluation** = the collection of information for the systematic examination of the effectiveness and impacts of program components, programs, objects, etc., for purposes of assessing the merit or worth of something.
- **Assessment** = identifying a current state of affairs.
- **Research** = developing generalizable or applied knowledge.

Evaluation is neither assessment nor research, but it uses these strategies.

# Research vs. Evaluation

- Research generalizes; Evaluation particularizes
- Research is designed to **prove** something; Evaluation is designed to **improve** something
- Research provides the basis for drawing conclusions; Evaluation provides a basis for decision making
- Research--how it works; Evaluation--how **well** it works
- Research is about what is; Evaluation is about what is **valuable**

This **research** is really going to help move our field forward.



This **evaluation** is really going to help our program become more effective.



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# Why It Is Important...



## Your Evaluation Plan:

- Connects your proposed activities to objectives and indicators
- Describes methods of evaluation, processes, tools, limitations, mitigation strategies
- Demonstrates capacity and strength of the proposer to do the work (thoroughness suggests effective project management)
- Provides accountability for timeline and deliverables
- Is evidenced throughout the proposal – budget, narrative description, supplemental documents such as data management plans, letters, facilities

# Project Evaluation Plan

## General steps for evaluation

### 1. What will you be evaluating?

- What component(s) of the project should/can be evaluated?

### 2. What are the questions your evaluation will answer?

- This should link back to your project's mission and goals.
- Might require you to break down the larger questions into smaller ones.





# The Right Questions

HIV/AIDS prevention program focused on minority young people in urban community.

Main question: Is the prevention program working?

Sub-questions:

- How do program participants compare to the population in general?
- Who actually participates in the prevention program?
- Does the program raise knowledge and awareness about HIV/AIDS?
- What are the attitudes and beliefs of participants and did they change?
- Was the environment conducive for learning?

# Project Evaluation

## 3. What type of evaluation do you want to use?

### **Formative or Process Evaluation**

- Assesses initial and ongoing project activities
- Begins during project development and continues through implementation
- Provides new and sometimes unanticipated insights into improving the outcomes of the project
- Involves review by the principal investigator, the steering or governance committee, and either an internal or external evaluator (depending on grant requirements)

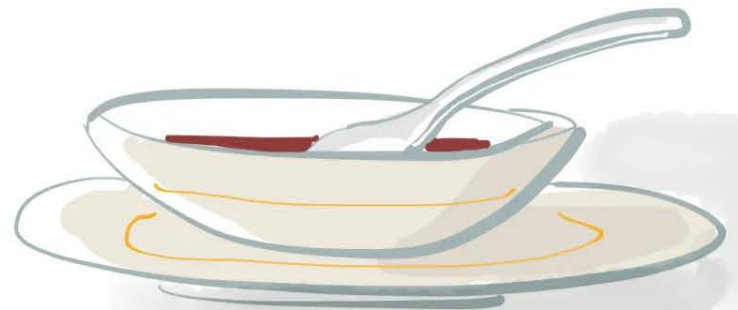
### **Summative or Outcomes Evaluation**

- Assesses the quality and success of a project in reaching stated goals
- Presents the information collected for project activities and outcomes
- Takes place after the completion of the project
- Involves review by the principal investigator, the steering or governance committee, either an internal or external evaluator, and the program director of the funding agency

# FORMATIVE SUMMATIVE



WHEN THE **CHEF**  
TASTES THE SOUP



WHEN THE **GUESTS**  
TASTE THE SOUP



# Outputs vs. Outcomes

**Outputs:** direct and measurable products of programs activities, often expressed in units.

- # of publications
- # of participants
- # of contact hours

**Outcomes:** results or impacts of the program/activity and refer to changes in knowledge or understanding, behavior or attitudes in participants.

- Reduced negative behavior
- # of accidents reduced
- Increased skill level

# Project Evaluation Plan

4. What information/data do you need to answer your questions?

- These need to align with questions you want to answer.
- Will you need baseline data or benchmarks?

5. What data collection methods will you use?

- Surveys, interviews, tests, observations, document analysis, etc.



# Project Evaluation Plan

## 6. How will the data be analyzed?

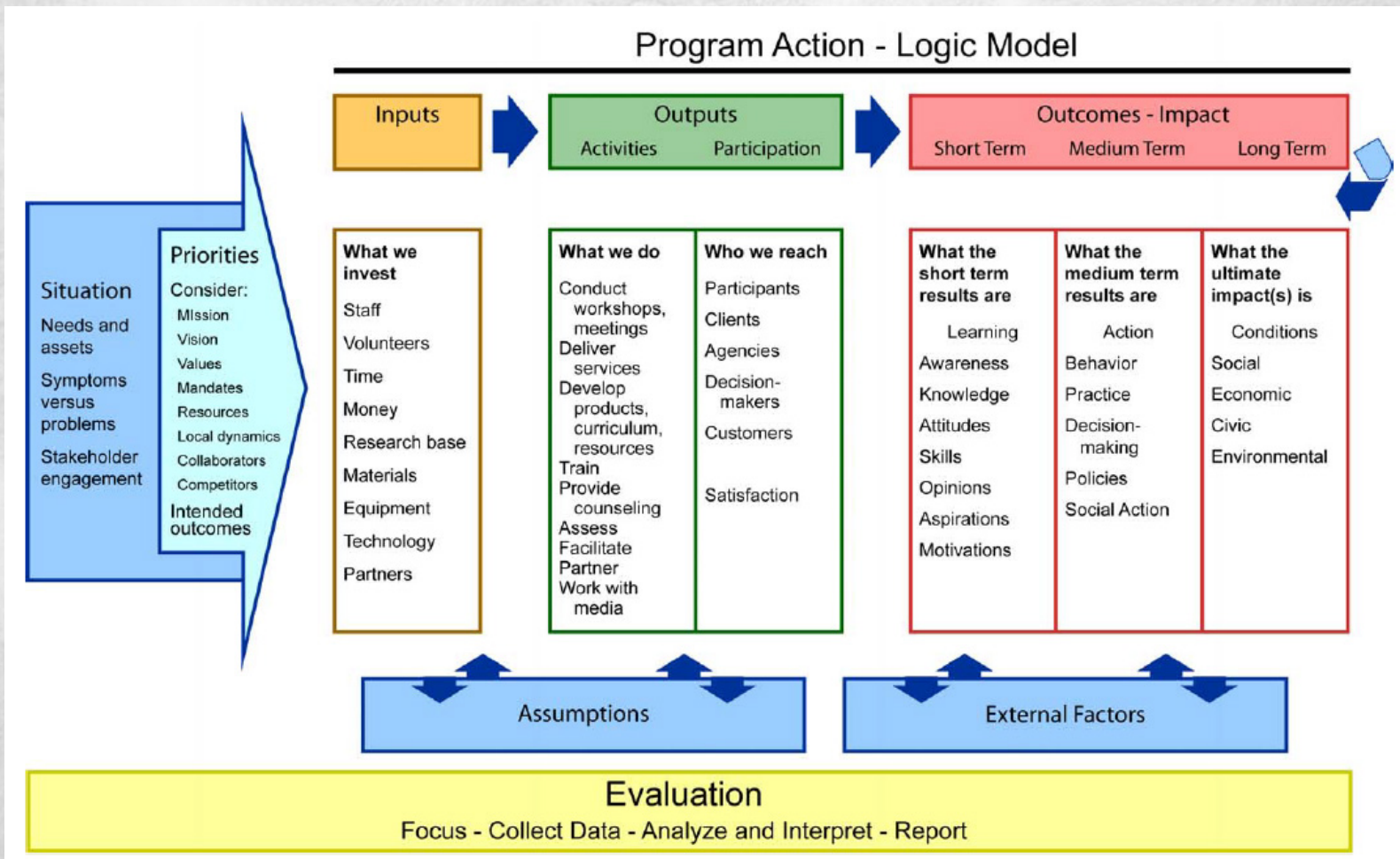
- Do you need someone with expertise in analysis?

## 7. How do you plan to use and share the results?

- Communication plan
- Are there requirements from the funding agency?



# Basic Logic Model



# Project Evaluation Plan

- How will your project define success?
- What will you observe that will convince you that this project was worth your effort?
- What story do you want to tell at the end of this project?
- Who needs to hear your story and what will they want to hear?
- Outcomes are motivating: Activities describe work. Outcomes, on the other hand, are visionary and are about the positive benefits you hope to attain.
- Outcomes help you focus: Once you have determined what success looks like, you'll think more carefully about how to accomplish it.
- Outcomes provide a reality check: If the logical connection doesn't hold, you can course-correct before you even start.
- Planned outcomes create deliverables: Ultimately, most of us want or have to report our efforts to stakeholders, who, by definition, have a vested interest in our program



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# Begin With the End in Mind



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# What Are Your Objectives?

- Goals and objectives must relate to or align with the goals of the funding agency, the purpose of the solicitation, and, if applicable, with the stated review criteria of the mechanism.
- Use your funding solicitation to plan your goals...for example, the solicitation's Review Criteria section provides the info on which your proposal will be evaluated.
- Competitive and Preference Priorities – are noted in the solicitation and must be among your project's objectives (U.S. Dept. Of Education)
- On what specific objectives will you measure outcomes? These are your Performance Measures and they will be evaluated in the project evaluation section.

# Parts of Your Evaluation Plan – Data

- What data is needed to support your questions and desired outcomes?
- What collection methods will you use to get the information/data?
- Special considerations for data collection/management/sharing?
- What resources are available to obtain the needed info?
- Which resources will you need to budget for?
- Who is responsible?

# Example

If you aim to demonstrate that more scholarships will improve retention and graduation rates for STEM majors, what data do you need?

- 1. demonstrate financial need
  - Cost of attendance, number of FG/LI student population, poverty rates in primary service area, unemployment, borrowing rates, Pell eligibility, etc.
- 2. demonstrate likekihood of retention
  - Enrollment, retention, completion data (comparative by discipline?)
  - Change in major due to realization of need for post grad or need to work
- 3. demonstrate deficit in scholarships available to this population
  - Comparison of availablilty and acceptance of other aid (merit, activity-based, alumni, etc.)

# Sources of Data

- Sources of data depend on the problem, but professional publications, census data, state and federal agencies are excellent sources

## MSU Sources:

Service Centers, colleges, and departments  
Office of Institutional Research  
Office of Institutional Effectiveness  
Library  
Institutional publications

## Other examples

IPEDS (integrated postsecondary data system from USDE)  
<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>

Mississippi Department of Education <http://reports.mde.k12.ms.us/>

US Depts of Labor, HUD, HHS, etc.

# Parts of your Evaluation Plan - Reporting

A Reporting Plan will specify:

- Who will get evaluation information – audience(s)
- What will be included in each report
- Timeline or frequency of reporting
- How the report will be delivered
- The style, format, and structure of reports
- How you will help audiences interpret and use reports
- Often “reporting” is embedded into the evaluation process as audiences are involved, consulted, or informed about the process and design of the evaluation.
- A "reporting plan" may be independent or aligned with specific objectives.

# Things to Consider: Budgeting for Evaluation

- Consider the RFP requirements (caps, limits, best practices – 10%)
- Type of agreement : consultant or contract?
- Fee/rate structure
- Clearly defined, time-bound deliverables aligned with requirements of RFP
- Scope of work/activities and time (travel, number of hours for implementation, number of hours for analysis, frequency of contact with stakeholders, preparation of reports)
- Other Evaluation inputs/resources (such as an advisory board)
- Data collection costs?
- Credentials will be outlined in the proposal within the qualifications of personnel section, evaluation plan, and/or biographical sketches/facilities and other resources

# Things to Consider When Selecting an Evaluator

- "Evaluation" and/or "Evaluator"
  - Consider the solicitation requirements (internal v. external)
- Does the individual have a track record of successful evaluation? With both qualitative and quantitative competency?
- Cultural competency with stakeholders, target audiences
- Familiarity with funding agency (preferences?)
- Responsiveness (will be required to provide deliverables/reports) and with contributing to proposal preparation
- Will the position require a bid/RFP? If so, what will that involve? (handout)
- If an evaluator is not named at time of proposal, you may include a job description (handout)

Credentials of the evaluator will be outlined in the proposal within the qualifications of personnel section, evaluation plan, and/or biographical sketches/facilities and other resources



# Resources

- Examples of Logic Models
- Handouts of Evaluation resources from NORDP
- MSU Internal Expertise
  - SSRC
  - nSPARC
  - Use ORED to facilitate contacts
- Other sources for finding individuals:
  - Professional Organizations within your discipline
  - Previously funded projects by sponsor (PI/PO referral)
- OSP Development
  - Solicitation analysis for Evaluation requirements/review criteria
  - Writing prompts/outlines for Evaluation plans
  - RFPs for evaluation
  - Graphics support
- Data platforms for Evaluation reporting
  - PieStar
  - Funder or subject-specific (ex: Dept. of Labor, Dept. of Education)

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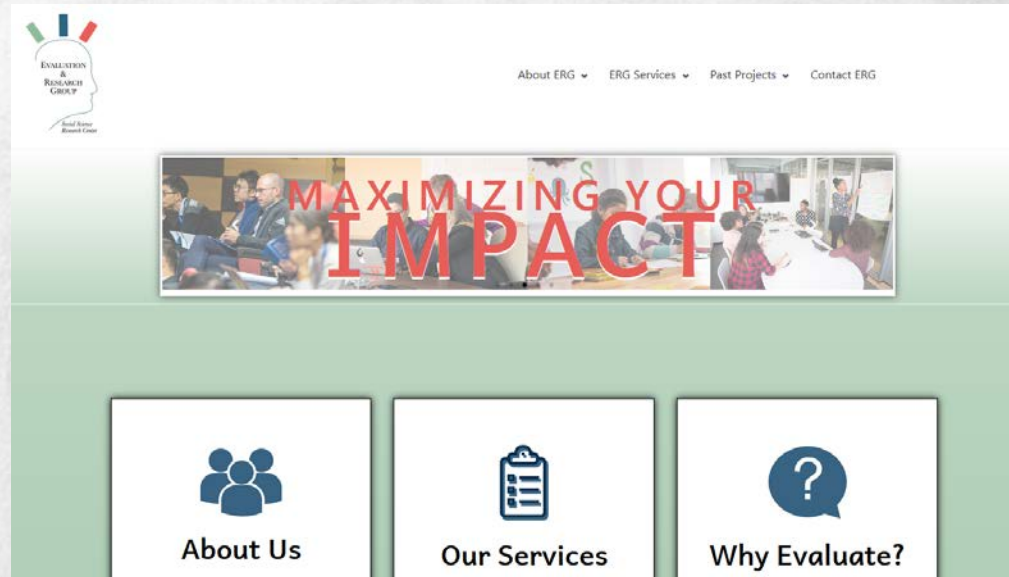


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# Evaluation & Research Group

Social Science Research Center @ MSU

<https://evaluation.ssrc.msstate.edu/>



# THANK YOU!

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