

Glossary of Terms

Accountability: responsibility to accomplish what is promised or agreed to.

Building evidence-base: using evaluation methods to assess programs and strategies to generate evidence of their effectiveness that can be used to make decisions.

Evaluation: the process of determining the merit, worth, or value of something. Programs, personnel, performance, and policy are examples of what is evaluated in the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors.

Evaluation capacity building (ECB): is the process of creating and sustaining organizational expertise and processes that make quality evaluation and its uses routine.

Evaluation plan: the articulation of the evaluation questions that will be investigated, and the description of design, methods, and data sources.

Experimental evaluation design: uses random assignment of subjects into control and experimental groups to determine cause and effect. Contrast with quasi-experimental and mixed methods evaluation design.

Formative evaluation: is conducted during the development or improvement of a program and it is conducted, often more than once, for the in-house staff of the program with the intent to improve. Contrast with summative evaluation.

Impact: is the longer-term effects from an intervention that improve conditions for individuals, families, organizations, communities, and/or systems.

Impact evaluation: is conducted when a program has been implemented to a degree that long-term effects are assumed to be achieved. Causation between program and condition changes (in individuals, families, organizations, communities, and/or systems) is investigated and proved, disproved, or unanswered. Contrast with process and outcome evaluations.

Learning: using information from past efforts to inform future efforts to improve effectiveness and efficiency.

Logic model: a visual representation that describes what you do, what you want to achieve and why you think your activities will lead to the desired outcomes. A logic model may also be referred to as a theory of change, log frame, or results framework.

Mixed method evaluation: evaluation design composed of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Contrast to experimental and quasi-experimental evaluation design.

Quasi-experimental evaluation design: a situation is treated as an experiment even though all variables cannot be controlled (e.g., participants may not be randomly assigned). Causality is

investigated, but conclusive findings are usually limited. Contrast with experimental and mixed methods evaluation design.

Outcomes: are the results, effect, or changes that occur as a result of an intervention. Common outcomes categories include changes in knowledge, awareness, skills, behaviors, policies, practices, and other conditions. Outcomes link together, and are often grouped as short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes.

Outcome evaluation: focuses on changes in outcomes rather than process. Contrast with process and impact evaluations.

Outputs: are the description and/or quantification of what was produced, completed, or implemented. For example, one publication and 573 clients served are both outputs.

Process evaluation: examines activities and outputs, and is rarely used alone since it does not address outcomes. Contrast with outcome and impact evaluations.

Rigor: the application of appropriate evaluation principles and practices in each step of the evaluation process.

Scaling impact: growing the effect of an intervention.

Summative evaluation: is completed after a program is implemented (or after a program model has been stabilized) usually for the benefit of an external audience. The purpose of summative evaluation is to decide if the intervention worked as hypothesized, needs further refinement, or will be discontinued. Contrast with formative evaluation.

Theory of change: a visual representation that describes what you do, what you want to achieve and why you think your activities will lead to the desired outcomes. A theory of change may also be referred to as a logic model, log frame, or results framework.