Evaluation in extension used to focus primarily on judging a program’s merit or worth. Additionally, the methodology associated with earlier forms of evaluation was portrayed as basically a quantitative activity. In today’s increasingly complex and demanding world, evaluation must deal with issues of accountability, good management, knowledge building and sharing, organizational learning and development, problem identification and policy formation. As the scope of evaluation expands, qualitative approaches and multiple methods are becoming increasingly necessary. Concurrently, today’s evaluator in extension finds that he or she needs to fulfill multiple roles and be familiar with numerous methods. This manual is designed to cover the expanding field of evaluation as it applies to extension and to provide you, the evaluator, with a methodological toolbox containing a broad array of methods and suggestions as to their appropriate use.

**What is Evaluation?**

Program evaluation is a continual and systematic process of assessing the value or potential value of Extension programs to guide decision-making for the program’s future.

We examine the assumptions upon which an existing or proposed program is based.

* We study the goals and objectives of the program.
* We collect information about a program’s inputs and outcomes.
* We compare it to some pre-set standards.
* We make a value judgment about the program.
* We report findings in a manner that facilitates their use.

**Why Evaluate?**

Demands on Extension for program efficiency, program effectiveness and for public accountability are increasing. Evaluation can help meet these demands in various ways.

**Planning**

* To assess needs.
* To set priorities.
* To direct allocation of resources.
* To guide policy

.**Analysis of program effectiveness or quality**

* To determine achievement of project objectives.
* To identify strengths and weaknesses of a program.
* To determine if the needs of beneficiaries are being met.
* To determine the cost-effectiveness of a program.
* To assess causes of success or failure

.**Direct decision-making**

* To improve program management and effectiveness.
* To identify and facilitate needed change.
* To continue expand or terminate a program

**Maintain accountability**

* To stakeholders.
* To funding sources.
* To the general public.

**Program impact assessment**

* To discover a program’s impact on individuals and/or communities.

**Advocate**

* To gain support from policy makers and advisory councils.
* To direct attention to needs of particular stakeholder groups.

**Steps to Evaluation Program**

Evaluation can be an overwhelming process. To make program evaluation less intimidating and more manageable it can be broken down into several manageable steps. The specifics of each step may vary, depending on the nature, scope and complexity of the programs and the resources available for conducting the evaluations. These steps will be expanded upon in later sessions.

**Step 1. Identify and describe the program to be evaluated**

Identify and describe the program you want to evaluate.

A description should include:

* its goals and objectives.
* the geographic boundaries of the program.
* the clientele served.
* the program funders.
* The program staff.

Identify the audience from whom you will gather information.

**Step 2: Identify the program phase & the appropriate type of evaluation study**

There are a number of types of evaluation studies: needs assessments, baseline studies, formative evaluations, summative evaluations and follow-up studies. The type of evaluation study utilized is selected on the basis of stage of program, program requirements and stakeholders’ interests.

**Step 3. Assess the feasibility of implementing an evaluation study** Assessing the feasibility of a program evaluation helps ensure that the program can be meaningfully evaluated and that the evaluation will contribute to improving program design and/or performance. Consider the following questions carefully and then decide whether this is an appropriate time to begin a program evaluation. If the answers to many of these questions are “No”, this may not be an appropriate time to implement an evaluation study.

* Is there an important decision to be made on the basis of the evaluation?
* Is there a commitment to use the evaluation findings?
* Will important program decisions be made regardless of evaluation findings?
* Is there a legal requirement to carry out an evaluation?
* Does the program have enough impact or importance to warrant formal evaluation?
* Is this a one-time program?
* Will this program continue?
* Is the cost of the program so low that

an evaluation is unnecessary?

* Is it likely that the evaluation will provide valid and reliable information?
* Is it likely that the evaluation will meet acceptable standards of propriety?
* Will the evaluation violate professional principles?
* Is the evaluation threatened by conflict of interest?
* Will the evaluation jeopardize the well-being of program participants?
* Is the program ready to be evaluated?
* If a summative evaluation is suggested, has the program been operating long enough to provide clearly defined outcomes?
* Are there sufficient human and monetary resources available to carry out an evaluation?
* Is there enough time to complete the evaluation?

**Step 4: Identify and consult key stakeholders**

Stakeholders are people who have a stake or vested interest in the evaluation findings. They can be program funders, staff, administration, clients or program participants. It is important to clarify the purpose and procedures of an evaluation with key stakeholders before beginning. This process can help determine the type of evaluation needed and point to additional reasons for evaluation that may prove even more productive than those originally suggested.

Come to agreement with stakeholders on:

* What program will be evaluated, what it includes and excludes.
* The purpose of the evaluation.
* The goals and objectives of the program Program goals and objectives can be written as statements indicating what the program will achieve and what criteria will be used to judge whether the objectives have been met.

**Each objective should**:

* contain one outcome.
* identify the target audience.
* specify what you expect to change as a result of program participation.
* be specific enough to be measurable.

Example:

Members of every household in Ingham county will increase their awareness about water quality by participating in a survey conducted by Michigan State University.

The indicators and criteria that will be used to judge value or worth of the program. When program objectives are clearly stated, the indicators and criteria to judge merit or worth will be explicitly stated.

* The questions and issues the evaluation will address.
* Who will participate in the evaluation?
* The budget and time available for the evaluation.
* The role of the evaluator.
* Who will receive the evaluation results?

**Step 5. Approaches to Data Collection**

There are two basic types of data collection: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data tend to focus on numerical data, while qualitative data are expressed in words.

**Quantitative Methods**

Measure a finite number of pre-specific outcomes and are appropriate for judging effects, attributing cause, comparing or ranking, classifying and generalizing results.

Quantitative Methods are:

* Suitable for large-scale projects
* Useful for judging cause and effect.
* Accepted as credible.
* Applicable for or generalizing to a larger population

**Qualitative Methods**

Take many forms including rich descriptions of people, places, and conversations and behavior. The open-ended nature of qualitative methods allows the person being interviewed to answer questions from his or her own perspective.

Qualitative Methods are appropriate for:

* Understanding the context in which a program takes place.
* Complex problems and process issues.
* Clarify relationships between program objectives and implementation.
* Identifying unintended consequences of a program.
* Gathering descriptive information.
* Understanding operations and effects of programs.
* In-depth analysis of program impacts.

**Multiple Methods**

combine qualitative and quantitative methods within one evaluation study. This combination can be used to offset biases and complement strengths of different methods. When using multiple methods, care should be taken to ensure that the selected methods are appropriate to the evaluation questions and that resources are not stretched too thinly.

Multiple Methods are appropriate for:

* Understanding complex social phenomenon.
* Allowing for greater plurality of viewpoints and interests.
* Enhancing understanding of the both the typical and unusual case.
* Generating deeper and broader insights.