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Part 1: Program Evaluation: What is it?

Brad Rose, PhD.



Program
Development
& Funding

Data Collection
& Outcome
Measurement

Feedback &
Continuous
Improvement

Impact &
Assessment
Reporting

Definition

Program Evaluation

- Is an applied (vs. theoretical) research process
- Systematically collects, analyzes and interprets data
- Addresses activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs
- Is focused on what is valuable or important

Goal of Program Evaluation

To assist stakeholders in making data-informed judgments about a specific program's:

- Impact
- Effectiveness
- Value

How Does Evaluation Differ from Research?

- Research is an investigation that seeks to find out what is.
- *Evaluation* is an investigation into how, why, and to what extent valued objectives or goals are achieved.
- Evaluation is research that compares what is with what should be. **It makes a judgment against criteria, expectations, standards.**
- Evaluation is normative, while using objective methods

“Value” in Evaluation Research

- “ We must value something to find it significant enough to measure, to pluck it from the complexity of human social life, and to see it as a set of phenomena worthy of study.”
Heather Douglas, *Facts, Values, and Objectivity*.

[https://www.academia.edu/3897904/
Facts Values and Objectivity](https://www.academia.edu/3897904/Facts_Values_and_Objectivity)

Examples of Research vs. Evaluation

Research: CNN investigates how many people voted Democrat, Republican, Independent, Green, etc.

Evaluation: Republicans investigate how many people voted Republican vs Democrat.

What is a Program?

- Structured, intentional, intervention to improve the well-being of people, groups, organizations, or communities
- General effort that mobilizes staff and resources toward some defined and funded goals
- Programs vary in size, scope, duration, clarity, and specificity of goals

What is a Program for?

Programs exist to create change.

Changes are typically called “**outcomes**”

Programs implement *activities* and *actions* called “**outputs**”

The outputs of a program seek to produce outcomes (i.e., changes, results, effects.)

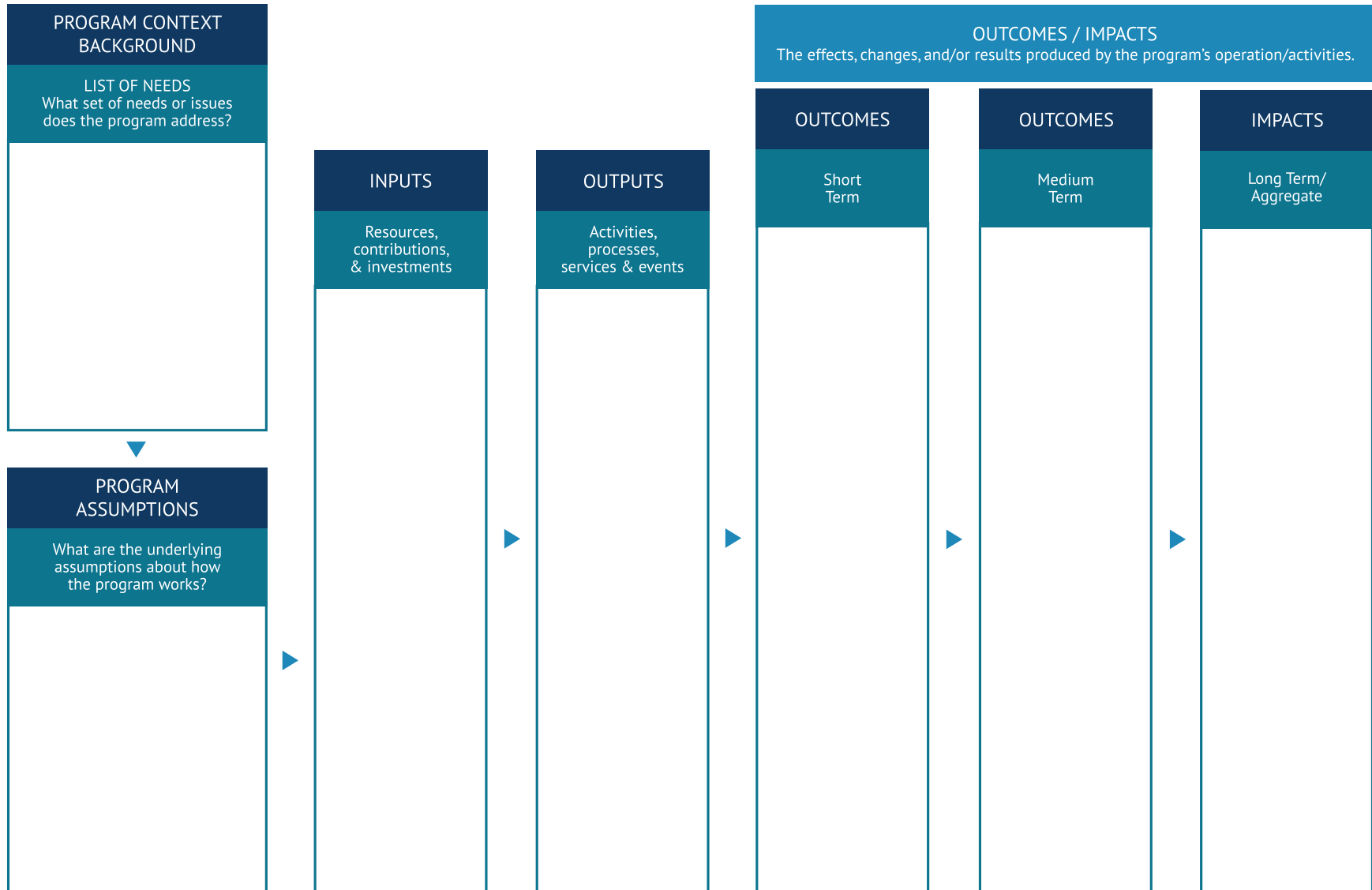
Program → Outputs → Outcomes

E.g. Program for Healthy Horses

Program → Outputs → Outcomes

Program goal: healthy horses

1. Program leads horses to water (**output**)
2. Horses drink water (yes/no)
3. Horses thrive (**outcome**)



Basic Purposes/Kinds of Evaluations

- **Formative evaluations** are evaluations whose primary purpose is to gather information that can be used **to improve or strengthen the implementation of a program**. Formative evaluations typically are conducted in the early- to mid-period of a program's implementation.
- **Summative evaluations** are conducted near, or at, the end of a program or program cycle, and are intended to show **whether or not the program has achieved its intended outcomes** (i.e., intended effects on individuals, organizations, or communities) and to indicate the ultimate value, merit and worth of the program.

Basic Purposes/Kinds of Evaluations

(cont.)

- **Process evaluations.** Typically, process evaluations seek data with which to understand **what's actually going on in a program** (what the program actually *is* and *does*), and whether intended service recipients are receiving the services they need. Process evaluations are, as the name implies, about the processes involved in delivering the program.

Basic Purposes/Kinds of Evaluations

(cont.)

- **Impact evaluations** gather and analyze data to show **the ultimate, often broader range, and longer lasting, effects of a program**. An impact evaluation determines the causal effects of the program. This involves trying to measure if the program has achieved its intended outcomes.

Typical Methods and Tools

- Interviews (Individual and Focus Group)
- Surveys and questionnaires
- Observations
- Review of existing data/records
- Collection and statistical analysis of quantitative data

Evaluation Design

Quantitative Methods:

Non-experimental design:

Pre- and post-test, “a single group interrupted time series”

(Observation → Treatment → Observation)

Experimental design:

Compare outcomes among “treatment” and “control” groups

Random → Observation → Treatment → Observation
Random → Observation → No Treatment → Observation

Evaluation Design

Qualitative Methods

- Interviews/focus groups with participants (staff and community members)
- Observations of program activities
- Document analysis
- Case studies
- Narratives/stories

These emphasize the importance of observation, the phenomenological quality of the evaluation context, and the value of subjective human experience/interpretation

Evaluation Design

The key to evaluation design:

The evaluation design should be determined by the kind of questions you want to answer.

Example Evaluation Questions

Examples of **Formative** Evaluation Questions:

- **How can the activities, products, and services of the program be refined and strengthened** during project implementation, so that they better meet the needs of participants and stakeholders?
- **What suggestions do participants and stakeholders have for improving the program?**
- Which elements of the program do participants find most beneficial, and which least beneficial?

Example Evaluation Questions

Examples of **Summative** Evaluation Questions:

- **What effect(s) did the program have on its participants and stakeholders (e.g., changes in: knowledge, attitudes, behavior, skills and practices)?**
- Did the activities, actions, and services of the program raise the awareness and provide new and useful knowledge to participants?
- What is the ultimate worth, merit, and value of the program?
- Should the program be continued or curtailed?

Fundamental Questions

- What will be changed or different as a result of the operation of the program?
 - Attitudes
 - Knowledge
 - Behavior
 - Feelings
 - Competencies/Skills
- What will a program's success "look like"?
- How will we show that intended changes occurred? (i.e., which measures/indicators?)

Questions?

Comments?

Thoughts?

Observations?

Resources:

<https://bradroseconsulting.com/whitepapers/>

- “Program Evaluation Essentials for Non-evaluators”
- “Preparing for a Program Evaluation”
- “Logic Modeling”



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Part 2. Ten Issues to Consider When Approaching an Evaluation:



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Why is the Evaluation Being Conducted?

Common reasons for conducting an evaluation are to:

- **monitor progress of program** implementation and provide formative feedback to designers and program managers (i.e., a *formative evaluation* seeks to discover what is happening and why, for the purpose of program improvement and refinement.)
- **measure final outcomes or effects** produced by the program (i.e., a *summative evaluation*)
- provide **evidence of a program's achievements** to current or future funders
- **convince skeptics** or opponents of the value of the program
- **elucidate important lessons** and contribute to public knowledge

Why Conduct an Evaluation? (cont.)

- **tell a meaningful** and important story
- provide information about **program efficiency**
- neutrally and impartially **document the changes produced** in clients or systems
- **fulfill contractual obligations**
- **advocate for the expansion or reduction of a program** with current and/or additional funders.

What is the “it” That’s Being Evaluated?

- program
- initiative
- organization
- network
- set of processes or relationships
- services
- activities

There are **many things that can be evaluated** in any given program or intervention. It may be best to **start with a few (2-4) key questions** and concerns. Also, for purposes of clarity, it may be useful to discuss **what isn’t being evaluated**.



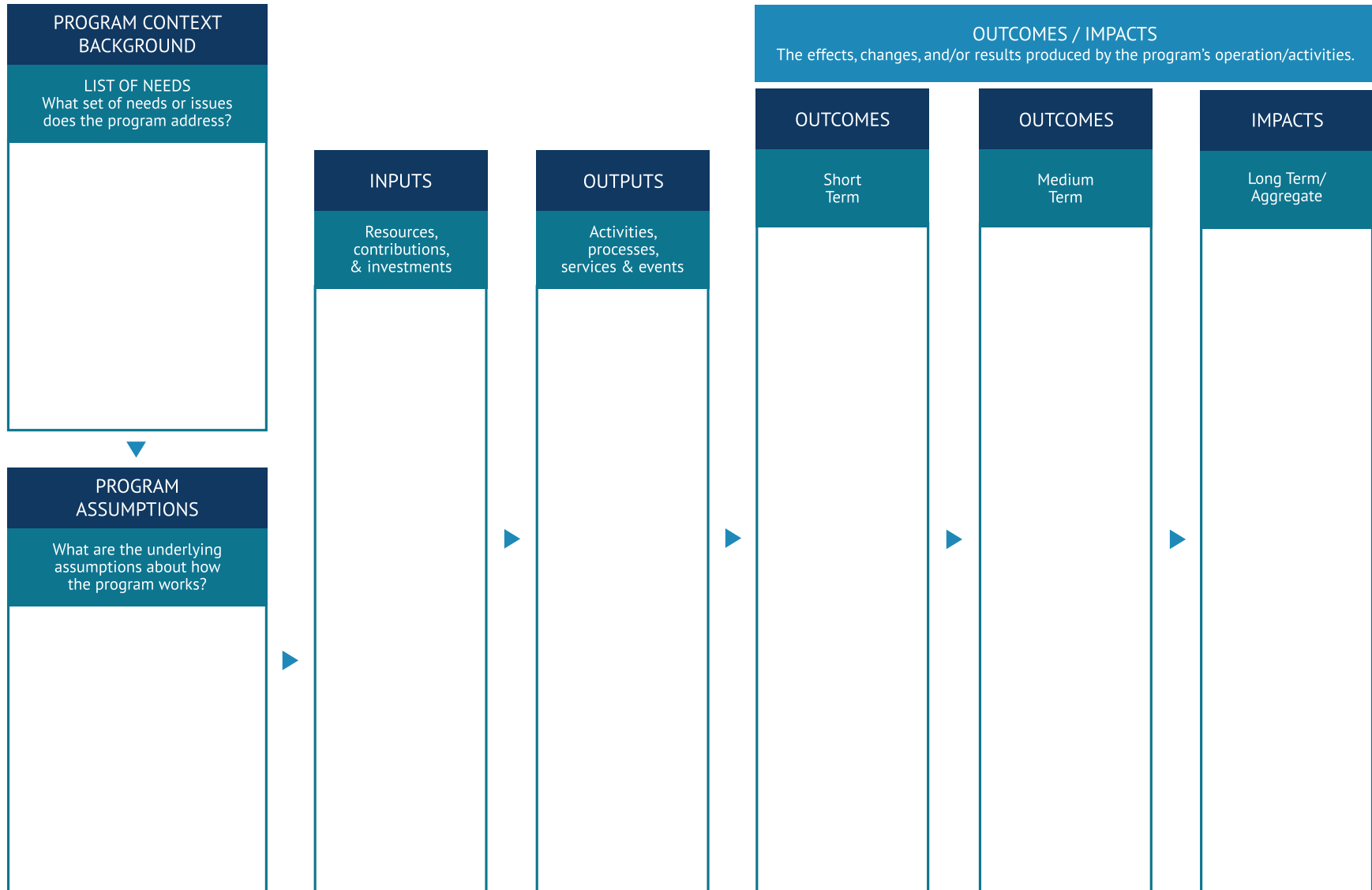
Describe What is Being Evaluated

- What's being done? (Logic model + narrative description)
- **Who does what to whom and when do they do it? (4 Ws)**
- Who (which people, and which positions) are doing/carrying out the program?
- Who (or what) is the program working to change? Describe who benefits and what the benefits are.
- What resources are involved? (not just money, but knowledge, cooperation of others, etc.)
- Are other organizations involved? (If so, what's their role, influence & effect on program operation and outcomes?)
- What specifically is supposed to change or be different as a result of the program doing what it does? (Usually multiple outcomes.)

What are the outcomes (i.e., changes, results, effects) that the program or intervention intends to produce?

- What is the program meant to achieve?
- What **changes** or **differences** does the program hope to produce, and **in whom/what**?
- What will be different as the result of the program or intervention?

Note: Changes can occur in **individuals, organizations, communities**, and other social environments. Typically, evaluations look at **changes in, and effects upon, persons/individuals**. However, changes need not be restricted to alterations in individuals' behavior, attitudes, capacities, or knowledge, but can extend to larger units of analysis, like changes in organizations, networks of organizations, and communities.



What are the Key Questions the Evaluation will Examine?

- What changes or outcomes do you want to evaluate?
- What are the most important changes you want to see occur?
- What do you want to be able to say/report about the program's effects?
- What story do you want to be able to tell with the findings of the evaluation?

Choose a reasonable number of evaluation questions. Only a few. Not 100.

By defining key questions, you can work with the evaluator to sharpen the focus of the evaluation, maximize the clarity and usefulness of the evaluation findings, and reduce wasteful efforts and costs. Don't collect data merely for the purpose of collecting data.

Who is the evaluation for?

- Who are the major stakeholders or interested parties for evaluation results?
- Who wants to know about the results of the program?
- Who are the various “end users” of the evaluation findings?

Who is the evaluation for? (continued)

There are a lot of potential stakeholders for evaluation findings —both external and internal.

- Current Funders
- Potential Funders
- Community stakeholders
- Advocacy organizations
- Government agencies
- Colleagues/peer organizations
- Program managers and program staff
- The “field”/public
- Political allies
- Voters
- Competitors

How Will Evaluation Findings Be Used?

- to improve the program (formative evaluation)
- to make judgements about the economic or social value/ benefits of the program—it's costs and benefits (outcome evaluation)
- to document and publicize the program's achievements (outreach and marketing)
- to sustain and/or expand the program (sustainability, scale-up)
- to curtail the program

What Information will Stakeholders Find Useful/Valuable?

- Statistical evidence of a program's impact (graphs, tables, charts)—i.e. **quantitative** accounts
- Stories and narrative illustrations (narratives about individuals', groups', communities' and/or organizations' changes, challenges, and successes)— i.e. **qualitative** accounts
- **BOTH quantitative and qualitative evidence** of outcomes, changes, and challenges i.e., **mixed methods**

What are the Potential Sources of Information/Data?

- Interviews (telephone and/or in-person),
- focus groups
- Program documents (records, logs, monitoring notes, ledgers, etc.)
- Surveys, quantitative/statistical data (existing or to-be-collected)
- Observations of program implementation
- Testimony of experts

Key question: What are the most accessible and cost effective sources of information about program participants?

What is the optimal design for the evaluation?

Which design will yield the most valid, accurate, and persuasive evaluation conclusions? Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods?

If interested in indicating a **cause and effect relationship between the program and desired outcomes**, is it possible (and desirable) to expend the resources necessary to conduct an **experimental design** (i.e., RCT or “randomized control trial”), or quasi-experimental design study?

Key Question: Is it **ethically feasible** to have a treatment and control group? Can you ethically deny or delay treatment to some program participants. Alternatively, can you give a basic and enriched program in order not to deny treatment?

What will be the “Product” or “Deliverable” of the Evaluation?

How are evaluation findings to be presented and disseminated?

- Written report
- Periodic verbal briefings
- A briefing paper
- Public presentation
- White paper/journal article/web resource

Program Evaluation Report

- Intro: Brief Program Description and Need for Program
- Evaluation Goals
- Summary of Evaluation Methodology
 - Quantitative methods
 - Qualitative methods
- Evaluation Findings
 - Effects and Benefits of the Program
 - Challenges
- Suggestions for Program Strengthening
- Conclusion

Review: Approaching an Evaluation

General questions to consider when conducting a program evaluation:

- Why is the evaluation being conducted?
- What is the "it" that is being evaluated?
- What are the intended outcomes of the program?
- What is the program meant to achieve?
- What are the key questions to be answered?
- Who is the evaluation for?

Review: Approaching an Evaluation

(cont.)

- Which information will stakeholders find useful?
- How will evaluation findings be used?
- What will be the “product” /deliverable of the evaluation?
- What are the potential sources of information/data?
- What is the optimal design for the evaluation?
- Which methods will yield the most valid, accurate, and persuasive evaluation findings and conclusions?

Quotes

"Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted, counts."

--Albert Einstein

"Things should be made as simple as possible, but not any simpler."

--Albert Einstein

"82.7% of all statistics are made up on the spot." --Steven Wright

Resources

On-line Resources:

www.bradroseconsulting.com

617-512-4709

