Basic Guide to Program Evaluation

A Brief Introduction ...

Note that the concept of program evaluation can include a wide variety of methods to evaluate many aspects of programs in nonprofit or for-profit organizations. There are numerous books and other materials that provide in-depth analysis of evaluations, their designs, methods, combination of methods and techniques of analysis. However, personnel do not have to be experts in these topics to carry out a useful program evaluation. The "20-80" rule applies here, that 20% of effort generates 80% of the needed results. It's better to do what might turn out to be an average effort at evaluation than to do no evaluation at all. (Besides, if you resort to bringing in an evaluation consultant, you should be a smart consumer. Far too many program evaluations generate information that is either impractical or irrelevant -- if the information is understood at all.) This document orients personnel to the nature of program evaluation and how it can be carried out in a realistic and practical manner.

Some Major Types of Program Evaluation

Goals-Based Evaluation

Process-Based Evaluations

Outcomes-Based Evaluation

Four Levels of Evaluation:

There are four levels of evaluation information that can be gathered from clients, including getting their:
1. reactions and feelings (feelings are often poor indicators that your service made lasting impact)
2. learning (enhanced attitudes, perceptions or knowledge)
3. changes in skills (applied the learning to enhance behaviors)
4. effectiveness (improved performance because of enhanced behaviors)

https://managementhelp.org/evaluation/program-evaluation-guide.htm

Overview of Methods to Collect Information

The following table provides an overview of the major methods used for collecting data during evaluations.
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<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Overall Purpose</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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</table>
| questionnaires, surveys, checklists | when need to quickly and/or easily get lots of information from people in a non threatening way | -can complete anonymously  
- inexpensive to administer  
- easy to compare and analyze  
- administer to many people  
- can get lots of data  
- many sample questionnaires already exist | - might not get careful feedback  
- wording can bias client's responses  
- are impersonal  
- in surveys, may need sampling expert  
- doesn't get full story |
| interviews                          | when want to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences, or learn more about their answers to questionnaires | - get full range and depth of information  
- develops relationship with client  
- can be flexible with client | - can take much time  
- can be hard to analyze and compare  
- can be costly  
- interviewer can bias client's responses |
| documentation review                | when want impression of how program operates without interrupting the program; is from review of applications, finances, memos, minutes, etc. | - get comprehensive and historical information  
- doesn't interrupt program or client's routine in program  
- information already exists  
- few biases about information | - often takes much time  
- info may be incomplete  
- need to be quite clear about what looking for  
- not flexible means to get data; data restricted to what already exists |
| observation                         | to gather accurate information about how a program actually operates, particularly about processes | - view operations of a program as they are actually occurring  
- can adapt to events as they occur | - can be difficult to interpret seen behaviors  
- can be complex to categorize observations  
- can influence behaviors of program participants  
- can be expensive |
| focus groups                        | explore a topic in depth through group discussion, e.g., about reactions to an experience or suggestion, understanding common complaints, etc.; useful in evaluation and marketing | - quickly and reliably get common impressions  
- can be efficient way to get much range and depth of information in short time  
- can convey key information about programs | - can be hard to analyze responses  
- need good facilitator for safety and closure  
- difficult to schedule 6-8 people together |
<table>
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<th>Case Studies</th>
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<td>To fully understand or depict client's experiences in a program, and conduct comprehensive examination through cross comparison of cases</td>
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<td>Fully depicts client's experience in program input, process and results - powerful means to portray program to outsiders</td>
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<td>Usually quite time consuming to collect, organize and describe - represents depth of information, rather than breadth</td>
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