WHEN AND HOW TO USE EXTERNAL EVALUATORS

By Tracey A. Rutnik and Marty Campbell

In March 2002 we presented this material at the national conference of Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO), *Capacity Building for Impact: The Future of Effectiveness for Nonprofits and Foundations*. Our session, titled "When and How to Use External Evaluators," was designed for program officers fairly new to evaluation who might be called upon to advise grantees about contracting an external evaluator or to directly commission evaluations on behalf of their foundations. We hoped to impart some of the skills and lessons we have learned through our own experiences with incorporating evaluation into a foundation setting.

We also scanned the literature and sought the input of colleagues and consultants with whom we have worked. They generously shared their experiences and offered tips for selecting and hiring the right evaluators and ensuring a smooth consulting engagement. We are especially grateful to Barbara Kibbe, former Director of Organizational Effectiveness and Philanthropy at The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, as we borrowed significantly from materials that she has produced on this subject throughout the years.

External evaluators are increasingly being used to help foundation staff set program goals, identify lessons, make midcourse adjustments, and measure program effectiveness. The success of their endeavors, however, relies in part upon how well the consulting engagement has been framed and whether the consultant is the right match for the project at hand. We hope that this material will serve as a resource to program officers to inform decisions about their allocation of resources and use of external consultants for program evaluations.

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INTRODUCTION

In the cycle of program planning by nonprofit organizations, evaluation is usually the last item on the agenda. There are many reasons for this. We all know that evaluation has negative connotations. It conjures up memories of the day we received our SAT results. It is associated with grades and scores. We know what these experiences can be like:

- They assume wrongdoing.
- They are only quantitative.
- They are mainly about control.
- They produce anxiety about how we measure up.

Many foundation staff experience one or several of the following fears about evaluation:

1. I don't speak the evaluation language.
2. I am not a numbers person.
3. Evaluation will drive the focus of the program.
4. It will make my grantees anxious.
5. It will make me look bad.
6. It will distract from the real work.
7. It will inhibit our entrepreneurial and innovative nature.
8. It means reading huge reports.

These fears are common and make us reluctant to pursue evaluation. Recently, however, new trends in thinking about and using evaluation have begun to facilitate positive responses and potentially powerful program effects.

AN EVOLVING DEFINITION

As a discipline, program evaluation grew out of the massive government programs of the 1960s and 1970s. Policymakers and bureaucrats turned to evaluation as a way to judge whether a program was successful and worth funding. Evaluation, however, did not provide the clear answers that decision makers desired. For their part, evaluators complained that their findings were ignored. In

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practice, evaluation was used by funders more as a control mechanism than as a learning tool, with the result that service providers became more focused on compliance than results and were rewarded for doing the paperwork rather than making a difference in clients' lives.

In response to this past, the concept of evaluation is shifting within the foundation field. Rather than simply using evaluation to determine whether grantees did what they said they would do, foundations are now using evaluation in ways that are fully integrated with the foundation's strategy and core planning processes.

Before embarking on any evaluation, you should address two fundamental questions:

1. What do you want to know?
2. Who will use that information, and how?

Identifying evaluation purposes and users generates questions that will then shape the evaluation methods. This sequence is important, because methods should not be chosen without purpose and audience in mind.

In terms of purposes, evaluations commissioned by foundations typically are undertaken to serve one or more of three general purposes:

1. **Accountability:** to measure the results of programs and account for use of foundation resources
2. **Knowledge generation:** to create new understanding about what works and what does not
3. **Program planning or improvement:** to support clear, well-designed, feasible, and measurable grantmaking programs and to support ongoing program planning, implementation, and overall organizational effectiveness

In terms of audiences, evaluations commissioned by foundations tend to address the information needs of one or more of the following audiences:

1. **Foundation**: board, executive management, program staff, donors (for community foundations)
2. **Grantee**: board, executive management, program staff, donors, clients, community residents
3. **Field**: nonprofit practitioners in the same field, consultants, academics, policymakers

All of these purposes and audiences are legitimate but they represent different ways to think about and organize an evaluation. They differ in regard to the questions that would be posed and the methods and evaluator competencies required to address those questions. The table below presents these differences on several dimensions.

EVALUATION AUDIENCES AND USE		
Priority Audience	**Intended Use**	**Key Questions**
Foundation Program Staff	Program Improvements (foundation grants program and grantees) Learning Accountability	• Did the program reach the target population? • Was the program implemented as intended? • How can implementation be improved? • Did the program achieve its intended outcomes? • What are external barriers or areas of weakness/dysfunction and how to intervene? • What sites or projects performed better than others? • How can the design of the foundation's grants program be improved? • Is this strategy still relevant and/or viable?
Board of Directors	Accountability	• Did the program achieve its intended outcomes? • How did the program contribute to the foundation's strategic goals? • Is the program worth the cost?
Grantees	Program Improvement Learning	• Was the program implemented as intended? • How can implementation be improved? • How can program efficiency be improved? • Is this strategy viable? • How can successes be effectively communicated to others to attract resources?
Policy Community	Accountability Learning	• Whom is the program serving? • Is the program reaching its target population? • What do participants think about the program? • Did the program achieve its intended outcomes? • Is the program cost-effective? • Is this strategy viable? • In what contexts is it most effective? • How does the program fit with other community improvement initiatives?
Local Community Members	Accountability	• Was the program implemented as intended? • What is the program accomplishing? • Is the program suited to our community needs? • How does this program compare to others in the community?

RESPONSIBILITIES OF EVALUATORS

The purposes and audiences for an evaluation should also determine the role of the evaluator. For example, if the focus is on program improvement, the evaluator may serve as a coach or technical assistance provider. If the focus of the evaluation is on accountability, the evaluators must maintain independence and a certain distance in order to be objective and assess the value, merit, and worth of the program. Depending on the situation, an evaluator may assume several of the following functions and roles:

FUNCTIONS OF EVALUATORS

- Training: helping grantees and foundation staff to think empirically, focus on specificity and clarity, and use evaluation data for planning and decision making
- Analyzing and Describing: collecting, examining, and reporting findings
- Interpreting: What do the results mean? What is their significance? Are the results positive, negative, or good enough?
- Recommending: What are the implications of the findings?

ROLES OF EVALUATORS

- Researcher: Collect and analyze data; report the facts.
- Judge: Are results positive or negative? What is their value?
- Auditor: Ensure compliance with grant award.
- Program Planner: Specify program model and goals.
- Coach: Assist in understanding how to monitor progress and use results.
- Technical Assistance Provider: Develop management information system (MIS); improve program or organizational processes.
- Facilitator: Surface hidden agendas, support reflection.
- Advocate for Social Justice: Give voice to different perspectives and value diverse experiences.

EVALUATORS: WHO ARE THEY?

The evaluation field is very young and as yet there is no certification process or degree in evaluation. This presents a challenge to program staff who may be seeking to assess the qualifications of evaluation consultants. Evaluators are trained in many fields and are based in many different types of institutions. Among the ranks are:

- Academic researchers
- Consultants from independent practices, for-profit firms, management support organizations, or nonprofit centers
- Volunteers: graduate students, former researchers or consultants
- Sociologists, economists, psychologists, educators

FACTORS INFLUENCING EVALUATION

Foundation program staff continually wrestle with the question of when it is appropriate to invest time and resources in evaluation. Several factors need to be taken into consideration:

- Stage of development of program
- Complexity of program
- Grantee experience with evaluation
- Heterogeneity of sites/grantees/participants
- Impetus for the evaluation
- Timeframe for evaluation
- Role of evaluator

COSTS

A common range for evaluation expenditures by foundations is 5 to 10 percent of the total program costs. The cost of an evaluation increases when you cannot rely on existing and publicly available data and must pay for primary data collection. The cost also increases in more complex programs, and with the necessity of collecting data from multiple sources and in multiple formats. And finally, the cost increases with a higher level of scientific rigor attached to the data collection effort. The following are some of the factors that influence the cost of an evaluation:
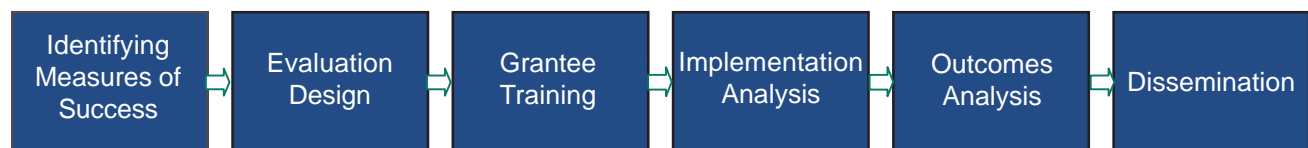
- Complexity of program
- Number of sites
- Customization required
- Labor required for data collection, analysis, and reporting
- Scientific rigor
- Need for grantee capacity building

GETTING TO RESULTS: WHY DOES IT TAKE SO LONG?

There are several stages to any evaluation that must be worked through before a foundation can get to "program results." The stages are listed below, along with the average timeframe required for each stage.

EVALUATION STAGES

Identifying Measures of Success → Evaluation Design → Grantee Training → Implementation Analysis → Outcomes Analysis → Dissemination

1. Clarification of program goals and identification of measures of success (3 to 9 months)
2. Evaluation design and creation of data collection instruments (3 to 6 months)
3. Grantee training in evaluation and/or data collection (1 to 2 years)
4. Data collection, analysis, and reporting of program *implementation* (1 to 3 years)
5. Data collection, analysis, and reporting of program *outcomes* (begin in year two of program)
6. Dissemination of program results and lessons (begin when some outcomes data are available, usually by year three of program)

A FEW CRITERIA FOR WHEN TO EVALUATE

Although many foundations are still developing and testing evaluation approaches, lessons have emerged, and the following are the most salient:

1. Programs and evaluation work best when anchored in clear goal statements and program theory. The ability of a foundation to learn from any evaluation depends in large part on the degree to which goals and expected outcomes have been articulated and are clear, measurable, and feasible.

2. The programs that foundations typically fund operate in complex social environments. Often, grants are part of a larger set of factors and circumstances that contribute to individual or community changes. It is therefore very difficult for a foundation to use evaluation to "prove" that the results achieved by any program can be directly attributed to the foundation. A more realistic use of evaluation in most circumstances is to measure program results and provide understanding of how the desired results were achieved or why they were not achieved.

3. Programs must achieve a certain threshold of maturity and stability before outcomes can be useful in drawing conclusions. Below that threshold, data is often not a reliable indicator of success or failure. Identifying intermediate steps or milestones that must be reached is a useful process to permit periodic assessment of program progress to ensure that you are on the right track.

4. Evaluation demands a significant amount of "ramp up" activity—identifying and hiring an external evaluator; specifying clear, measurable goals; and developing an evaluation plan and means of measurement. Only after this time-intensive, preliminary work can the evaluation begin collecting information, interpreting the results, and sharing and reflecting on those results.

5. Grantees are more likely to use and benefit from evaluation if they are ready to commit staff time and resources and if they have ownership of the process and findings, which means they must be actively involved in the evaluation and they should not be in the midst of an organizational crisis or major transition. Evaluators must therefore involve them by preparing substantial groundwork for the process and reinforcing the intended use of evaluation at every step along the way.

6. It only makes sense to conduct evaluations when foundation program staff members are receptive to outside scrutiny and critical feedback of their programs and willing to share and learn from their shortcomings or missed opportunities.

SELECTING AND ENGAGING AN EVALUATOR

GETTING STARTED
After completion of a thoughtful assessment of the evaluation project at hand, and with an understanding of the role(s) the evaluator is expected to play, who the stakeholders and potential audiences are, and whether the situation calls for a scientifically rigorous evaluation or someone to work with or coach grantees, then it's time to consider consultants. Remember that the evaluator role determines the expertise and style needed in a consultant; the grantee role influences evaluation implementation and use (*e.g.,* grantees as "specimen," evaluation customer, or participant-evaluator); and the funder "sets the stage" for the evaluation, which influences credibility, trust, and the ultimate "value-added." Your organization's culture and the way it structures its relationships with grantees will influence how the evaluation is implemented.

REQUESTING PROPOSALS
To select qualified consultants, two options are to issue a formal request-for-proposals (RFP) or "shop" the project around informally through networks and word-of-mouth. One of the best ways to locate consulting candidates is through personal networks and recommendations from colleagues. If that does not yield a short list of candidates, try searching organizational list serves, such as the American Evaluation Association (www.eval.org), or contacting grantmaking colleagues at Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (www.geofunders.org).

Whether proposals are requested informally or through an RFP, it is important to have a clear description of the project—its goals, expectations, available data and resources, budget, timeline—so the evaluator can prepare a proposal. It is always wise to solicit a formal proposal(s) and review it (them) competitively, even if initial conversations lead you to just one potential consultant. The proposal provides an opportunity to review the potential consultant's writing style and will ultimately serve as the basis for the contract.

A word of advice: It helps to know your "standing" with regard to the size of the project. If the potential contract is small, such as a case study of one grantee, the consultant pool will be very different than if you have a $150,000 evaluation budget. It's often harder to find a consultant for the smaller jobs. Also, if you engage a larger consulting firm, you may find yourself at the bottom of the priority list. Be sure to inquire during the interview about the consultant's capacity to take on the project.

REVIEWING PROPOSALS
The more knowledge the project manager has about standard evaluation and research methodology practices, the easier it will be to evaluate proposals from equally competent consultants. It's a good idea to brush up on the strengths and weaknesses of the most common research methods. There are a fairly limited number of standard data gathering approaches (focus groups, surveys, participant observations) to understand. Someone who has absolutely no background in this area might want to look for training opportunities or basic texts that can explain data gathering approaches. It is important to understand the techniques and modes of inquiry you are "buying" as part of a consulting contract.

A word of warning: If the proposal is indecipherable because it's written in "science-speak," then the consultant's work products may be as well. This is not a good sign. The proposal should be written in a language that you can understand and should present a coherent plan. Also, don't be scared off because you are not "a numbers person." Sophisticated data analyses are quite rare for most evaluations in a foundation setting—generally, you need to understand means and percents, not hierarchical linear modeling. If complicated analyses or methodologies are proposed, they—and the appropriateness and advantages of their use—should be explained in the proposal or during the interview.

INTERVIEWING POTENTIAL EVALUATORS

After sorting through the proposals and selecting the top candidates, it is important to conduct interviews. Use the proposal as the beginning of a conversation about the nature and scope of the evaluation project. If there are things that you don't understand, be sure to ask! If there are activities that don't seem necessary, say so. If the budget does not seem reasonable, ask for an explanation. If other consultants suggested strategies that appealed to you, ask whether the proposed plan could be modified to incorporate those additional elements. The discussion with the prospective consultant is important, as it will be the basis for the next stage of the process: creating a contract and refined scope of work.

INTERVIEWING EVALUATORS

Competencies

√ What is your view of how and when external evaluations are most useful?

√ Have you undertaken evaluations of initiatives (programs, projects) similar to this in the past? Please discuss.

√ From what you know so far, would you say that this initiative (program, project) is ready for an external evaluation? Why/Why not?

√ Are you familiar with any prior research, evaluations, studies, or publications that are relevant to the initiative (program, project) we want to evaluate?

√ Are there accepted/proven best practices in this field that we can refer to or build on in our evaluation?

√ What methodologies would you recommend for a formative (summative) evaluation of this initiative (program, project)?

Approach and Style

√ How would you describe your style as an evaluator? Do you see yourself as a proponent of empowerment, participatory, process, or impact evaluation? Whose writing on the subject of evaluation do you most admire and why?

√ How would you propose to involve various stakeholders in the design and implementation of the evaluation?

√ What would be your ideal relationship with your client? How would we work together?

√ Please describe a really satisfying evaluation that you led. What made it satisfying for you?

Capacity

√ Do you have the time to take on this work and give it the necessary personal attention?

√ To what extent would associates be involved in the work? May we meet the other team members?

A Final Question

√ You're the expert. What else should I be asking you to help us determine if we would work well together and if we have basic agreement about the contract terms and scope of work?

From Barbara Kibbe, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, 2000. Used with permission.

But more important, the interview is a chance to get a feel for the consultant's approach, style, and personality. The "perfect" consultant on paper may turn out to be very difficult to get along with or someone that you might not be comfortable foisting on your grantees. Sometimes it's better to go with the consultant with whom you are confident you can work rather than the one with superior credentials. Even if you're very pleased with a prospective consultant, it is a good idea to ask for and check references. Also ask to see examples of final work products. (Are they professional-looking reports or pages stapled in the left-hand corner? Is the writing style sophisticated yet readable?)

Some things to consider:
- Formal academic preparation/specialized training
- Evaluation expertise
- Evaluation philosophy or approach
- Evaluator's client base—the size of the contract may influence the relationship or responsiveness
- Capacity: Do they have sufficient staff and time to do the work?
- Track record: Check references and ask to see samples of work products!
- Geography: Will a consultant 1,000 miles away be as responsive as a local one?
- Personal style: Can you work with this group? Can your grantees?

Contract and Scope of Work

A detailed contract is essential for both the foundation and the evaluator. The scope of work developed at the outset of the consulting project should be as precise as possible—with full descriptions of expected deliverables (including presentations to the staff and board), timelines, etc. This will ensure that everyone has the same expectations about the consulting engagement and expected outcomes, which will be critical if for some reason the project goes awry.

The contract should also include a payment schedule. Generally, there are three payment options:

1. A periodic payment schedule. Fixed-sum payments at regular intervals (generally monthly or quarterly) through the course of the project, presuming satisfactory progress.
2. A pay-as-you-go arrangement. Pay for each task or component of the project as it's completed.
3. A lump-sum payment. Usually due at the end of the project. Often a consultant will request a payment of a retainer up front—full payment at the end is quite risky for the consultant.[1]

Regardless of which option is chosen, it is a wise idea to tie payments to major deliverables, such as mid-year summary memos or interim reports, year-end progress reports, and the final report. This will help ensure timeliness and provide leverage if things aren't going as planned. Contract language should ensure that program staff has an opportunity to review major deliverables and request modifications if they do not meet expected standards of quality. If the evaluation team has been hired primarily because of the qualifications or expertise of certain staff, then those staff should be named directly in the contract and the funder should have the right to terminate the contract if the team changes markedly and is no longer satisfactory—this will protect the foundation from a "bait and switch."

The terms of the agreement should be tight enough to ensure that the client's needs are met, but flexible enough to ensure that mid-course corrections or changes in the evaluation strategy are possible. Remember, evaluation is not a precise science and modifications in the work plan may become necessary. Evaluations generally take more time than anticipated; delays and obstacles are common. If possible, maintain an evaluation "reserve fund" in the budget so that if externalities require significant modifications or additions to the contract, resources are available to support additional research or activities.

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[1] From *Succeeding with Consultants. Self-Assessment for the Changing Nonprofit*. Barbara Kibbe and Fred Setterberg. The Foundation Center, 1992.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND OWNERSHIP OF THE DATA

It is important to clarify up front how the evaluation team will handle issues of confidentiality. If they discover that a grantee is bankrupt, do they tell the foundation immediately or at all? How will that affect the foundation's relationship with other grantees? It is also important to specify who has ownership of the data and to whom the information can be given. Release of information to outside parties should always be cleared with appropriate staff. Copyright ownership should be addressed in the contract to clarify whether the consultant has any right to publish the evaluation results.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS—WHO IS THE CLIENT?

In negotiating the relationship with the consultant, it is very important to determine and clarify for whom the work is being done. For some evaluations, the funder is the sole client. For others the grantee may be the client, or it may be a three-way partnership through which the grantee is empowered to invite the grantmaker into the learning process to share what is and what isn't going well. If the grantee is the primary client, how the consultant is selected affects the quality of the relationship and the quality of the work—the funder should not mandate which evaluator should be hired. Rather, if the grantee is the client (perhaps the funder is merely paying for the evaluation), the grantee should take an active role in the selection process. The funder can advise or recommend during this stage, but ultimately it's best to yield to the grantee for the final decision. If you have very strong reservations about the potential consultant the grantee has selected, which jeopardize the nature and extent of the foundation's support for the project, these concerns should be discussed with the grantee immediately.

SOME GENERAL ADVICE

Grantees should understand why the foundation is conducting the evaluation, how the findings will be used, and what level of participation or cooperation your organization expects between the evaluation team and their organization. Also, give them the opportunity to comment, ask questions, and voice concerns. The evaluation experience should not be threatening or mysterious for your grantees! It's unwise to have the evaluator make the first contact with the grantees, as this might cause unnecessary anxiety and may strain the evaluator's ability to develop a positive relationship with the grantee organization, which is generally critical for success.

MANAGING THE EVALUATOR

It takes much more time than anyone may think to manage an external evaluator or consulting team. Regular contact is a must! Make sure that a foundation staff person has the time, willingness, and "authority" to adequately manage the consulting team. The staff should be comfortable "pushing back" if the evaluation seems off-track.

WHEN THE CONSULTING RELATIONSHIP FAILS…WHAT ARE THE DANGER SIGNS?[2]

Barbara Kibbe and Fred Setterberg provide useful advice on the danger signs of a failing consulting relationship in their book *Succeeding with Consultants*, some of which is excerpted below.

Deadlines are missed. Reliability is crucial. If your consultant lacks the time, skill, commitment, or interest to keep up his or her side of the bargain, you're in deep trouble. Confront this issue directly. Treat deadline inconsistency in the same way you would deal with it from a staff member. But first, of course, make certain that you've provided the consultant with all of the information and resources that you had promised—and on time.

Communication is difficult. You could be calling too often. Or, the consultant is over-committed and can't keep up with his or her present tasks. Demand that you get the full attention you've contracted for—or end the relationship.

Constant changes in the work plan. As the consultant's road map, the work plan may need to be renegotiated during your collaboration as new information is unearthed or as initial strategies prove ineffective. But it should not be in constant flux. Usually the client, rather than the consultant, will be guilty of tinkering too much with the work plan—often because of (probably unconscious) uncertainty about the desirability of change or a failure to stipulate (or comprehend) the project's objectives. Another variation on this counterproductive theme is the constant shifting of the consultant's contact person inside your organization.

Some consulting engagements just need stronger management to get them back on track. Others, however, may be hopeless failures. If a poor relationship with a consultant seems intractable, or if the products are horribly deficient or delinquent, you may want to consider terminating the contract. That's when you'll be thankful for strong contract language that protects the foundation's interests.

EVALUATION AS A PROCESS

Finally, keep in mind that evaluation is a *process* that should not end with the report! Build in steps—and allocate resources—to implement the findings to improve future grantmaking and to share the lessons learned!

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[2] From *Succeeding with Consultants. Self-Assessment for the Changing Nonprofit.* Barbara Kibbe and Fred Setterberg. The Foundation Center, 1992. Used with permission.

EVALUATION TERMINOLOGY

Activities/Strategies
What a program or organization does with its resources to fulfill its mission, such as sheltering and feeding homeless families.

Attribution
The process of identifying the single or multiple factors responsible for an observed outcome; for example, program participation reduced stress by 50 percent.

Benchmark/Performance Target
Desired level of an indicator, possibly within a given time frame—for example, reduce child abuse by 25 percent by the year 2000.

Conceptual Framework/Model
Pictorial representation of the most critical elements underlying a program's operation and expected outcomes. A conceptual framework identifies critical areas for evaluation.

Context/Contextual Factors
Factors outside the control of a program or project that might have an impact on its effectiveness—for example, unique characteristics of a particular community, the economy, new federal or state legislation.

Control/Comparison Group
In an evaluation involving two or more groups, the group that does not receive the full program or treatment that is the focus of the evaluation. A control group receives no program. A comparison group may receive some program, but not the program being evaluated.

Correlation
The co-occurrence, either simultaneously or sequentially, of two events or characteristics that may or may not be causally related to one another—for example, hiring a new director and an increase in employee satisfaction.

Evaluation
The systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of a program to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming. (Michael Quinn Patton)

Some types of evaluation:

Formative evaluation—Evaluation undertaken in the initial stages of program operation to inform program development and implementation. Formative evaluation addresses how the program is working and how it might be improved. Often, formative evaluation explores alternative program approaches to see which variant works best.

Summative evaluation—Evaluation of the overall worth of the program after it is in operation.

Participatory evaluation—Evaluation that seeks to actively involve all stakeholders in the evaluation process. Participatory evaluation seeks to create an egalitarian process in which all stakeholders' perspectives are considered and in which the evaluation results are useful and relevant to the stakeholders.

Empowerment evaluation—Evaluation in which evaluators (also known as coaches) work to enhance the participants' evaluation capacities and help participants apply their knowledge of the program to the evaluation. Empowerment evaluation uses evaluation tools to help participants reach decisions and identify areas needing change.

Process evaluation—Evaluation that describes implementation of a program—that is, the activities undertaken as part of a program. A process evaluation can provide information on a program's structure, procedure, and accomplishments; problems encountered in the program implementation; and how the problems were resolved or not.

Outcome evaluation—Evaluation focused on the benefits or changes occurring in program participants after program participation.

Impact evaluation—Evaluation focused on the effect of a program with the intention of being able to attribute any observed changes to the program. Attributing impact solely to the program requires certain evaluation designs that control for other factors that might affect the outcome of interest (see "Control/Comparison Group" and "Randomized Trial Design").

Cluster evaluation—Projects are designated as a cluster because they support similar strategies, serve the same target population, or collectively address a specific outcome, such as systemic institutional or policy changes. Cluster evaluations examine such a cluster of projects to determine how well they achieve the broad goals of a programming initiative. (Kellogg Foundation)

Experimental Group
In an evaluation involving two or more groups, the group that receives the program or treatment being evaluated.

Generalizability
Extent to which evaluation findings can be applied to similar programs in other settings.

Goal
Broad, general statement of purpose. A goal can also be more closed-ended and specify the long-term intended result of the project or program—for example, increasing the participation of minorities in higher education.

Indicator
Measure of an outcome—for example, the proportion of the population with high blood pressure.

Inputs
Resources dedicated to or consumed by the program, such as money, staff, and facilities.

Logic Model
Pictorial representation of how a program is expected to work. Logic models show the theory underlying the program by linking assumptions/principles and/or resources with activities/processes and short- and long-term outcomes.

Milestone
A critical point that a project must reach to ensure that it is on course in achieving its stated outcomes.

Objective
Specific, measurable, time-bound operational statement of the desired accomplishments of the program that are necessary to achieve its goal. Example: Increase the number of minority students taking four years of mathematics in secondary school.

Outcome
Benefit or change resulting from an action. Often used to refer to benefits to individuals, families, communities, or larger populations during or after program participation (for example, reduction in the number of low-birthweight babies). Can also refer to change in systems, organizations, or programs—for example,

improved communication or increase in number of clients served.
- Short-term outcomes: outcomes that can be reasonably expected within the first one to two years of project or program
- Intermediate outcomes: outcomes expected in three to five years
- Long-term outcomes: outcomes expected in more than five years

Outputs
Direct products of program activities. Usually measured in terms of volume of work accomplished, such as number of classes taught.

Qualitative Techniques
Measures that provide descriptive information about situations, events, and/or behavior of individuals. Qualitative techniques focus on what the program experience means to participants in their own words, through, for example, interviews, observations, document analysis, or focus groups.

Quantitative Techniques
Measures that strive for precision by focusing on things that can be counted—for example, data from questionnaires, tests, standardized observation instruments, program records.

Randomized Trial Design
Evaluation design in which potential program participants are randomly assigned to either the experimental or the control group. It is the strongest design for showing program impact; however, it is not applicable for many programs.

Results-Based Accountability (RBA)
Management and monitoring of projects and programs focused on the desired outcomes of the programs rather than on activities and inputs.

Validity
Extent to which a data collection technique measures what it is intended to measure—especially important in identifying indicators for outcomes.