

LESSON 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TO POLICY EVALUATION

In this lesson, you were presented with some common challenges of conducting policy evaluation and some methods for overcoming those challenges.

The objectives for this lesson were

- **List challenges of conducting policy evaluation.**
- **Identify methods to overcome common challenges to policy evaluation.**

KEY POINTS

Challenges	Potential Solutions
Fear of evaluation and lack of familiarity with policy evaluation methods	When in doubt, ask for clarification of the rules. For some things, you may be able to identify key nongovernmental partners to evaluate areas best suited to their capacities and expertise. Start by determining the goal of your evaluation activities. This will shape how you approach the evaluation, the stakeholders you engage, and the methods and data that you will use to perform the evaluation.
Lack of control over policy implementation	Although you may not have control over the implementation of the policy, you can closely monitor implementation so that you clearly understand how the policy was implemented. Conducting a policy implementation evaluation can help with interpretation of impact evaluation results and provide insight into mid-course adjustments for improving implementation.
External and contextual factors such as economic conditions or public awareness	When there are many external factors involved, evaluation can be challenging. Measure contextual factors to the extent possible, and develop an evaluation plan that measures short-term and intermediate outcomes that logically link to long-term outcomes.
Lack of resources or clear responsibility for evaluation	It's important to define roles and responsibilities early on, including what resources you will need and where you will get them. Consider integrating a menu of activity options if resource availability is variable. Create a clearly written evaluation plan that is flexible and delineates specific roles and responsibilities. Identify, and partner with, the stakeholder who has responsibility for monitoring the implementation (if it's not your own agency).



Challenges	Potential Solutions
Conflicting results	Triangulating data sources and results can be an important way to gain confidence in the evaluation results; however, it is possible that there will be contradictory findings. When weighing the results, consider whether the appropriate methods were used, the extent to which data accurately represent the indicator or impact, the robustness of the findings using different methods, and your confidence level in the logic model and theory of change. Also consider the statistical significance and magnitude of the findings, the assumptions made by statistical tests, and the match between evaluation methods and evaluation questions.
Rapid pace of policy Political scrutiny and desire for quick production of results	Some policies receive a great deal of attention from politicians and other decision-makers who want information as soon as possible. Even when you're not under this type of scrutiny, never underestimate the value of advanced planning. If at all possible, strive to thoroughly develop the evaluation plan. Be sure to identify potential indicators upfront to plan for their collection, and don't limit yourself to long-term outcomes. Identify short-term and intermediate outcomes as well.
Lack of strong evidence base to support policy	To assist with identifying or developing appropriate measures, conduct a stakeholder discussion, or reach out to communities that have done similar evaluations. Although the right data may not be readily available to your agency, it may be accessible by partner organizations or agencies. Look for available pre-existing data sources, and reach out to other stakeholders that may have access to the information you need. Explore the linkage of multiple data sets to increase analysis possibilities. Consider evaluating multiple aspects of the policy (such as content, implementation, and impact) to inform interpretation of the results.
Lag in availability of data for evaluation	Sometimes it takes a while for a policy to show results. Ensure that your evaluation plan factors in the availability of data. You can speed up the process by partnering directly with the agency that collects the data rather than waiting for the data to become publicly available. In addition, identify short-term and intermediate outcomes that may be available sooner than the long-term outcomes.
Challenges of finding an equivalent comparison group	Finding an equivalent comparison group may be a challenge for some evaluations, but don't give up just yet. Depending on your evaluation question and design, it is not always necessary or appropriate to use an equivalent comparison group design. Consider alternative designs, and look for opportunities to use within-group comparisons. Identify variables within the implementing community, such as degree of implementation, which may allow for comparisons

