

What the @*%# is Program Evaluation?

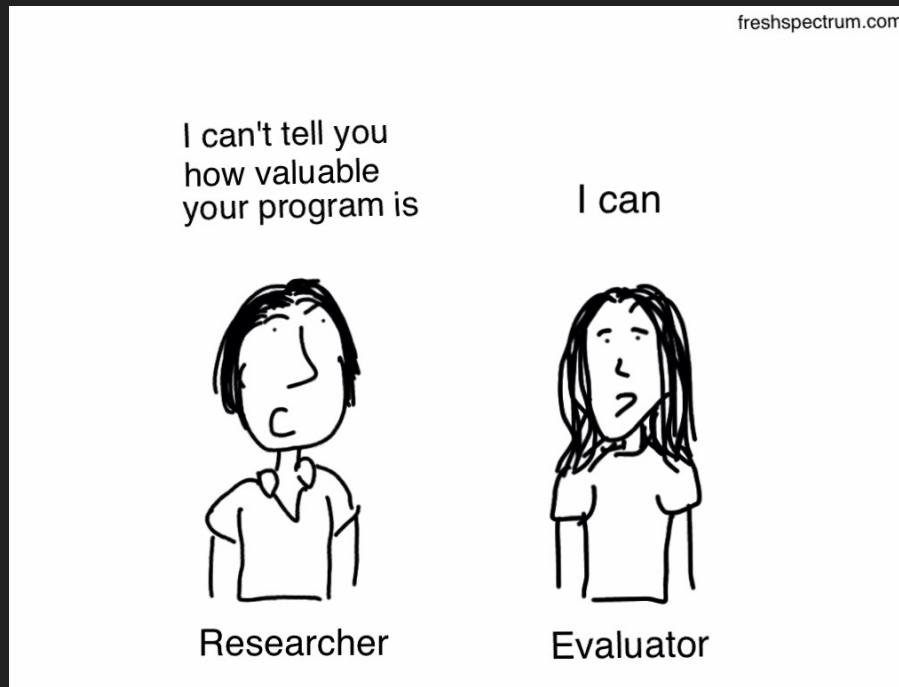
Dr. Abhik Roy

Before Starting

There are many types of evaluations (e.g. personnel, product, etc.) each with their own distinct purposes, approaches, and general outcomes. For the sake of this slideshow, we'll use the term **evaluation** to refer to **program evaluations**.

First things First: Evaluation is not

- research
- or
- assessment



Assessment

- Asks what is going on at this very moment?
- Provides a snapshot that may be in conjunction with other snapshots to gain a basic picture.
- Can be answered with a yes or no but only for "right now"
- Is a part of the evaluative process

Research

- Asks *how so?* and *what are the general implications based on the sample?*
- Provides information to propagate further research
- Cannot be answered with a yes or no and is intended to propagate knowledge
- Is generally disjoint from evaluation except in research methodology and design

Evaluation is Based on

standards
associated with *with the intent to uncover*

Validity the degree to which the variable measures what it is intended to measure

Reliability the extent to which the measurements remain consistent over repeated tests
of the same subject under identical conditions

Evaluation is Conducted to

with the caveat that

collect evidence access to resources and data will be limited

get to the truth an evaluation may never see the light of day

So what is evaluation then?

There are two overarching types

- Informal
- Formal

Informal evaluation

You do this everyday!



Formal evaluation

Evaluation is the process of determining the merit, worth and value of things, and evaluations are the products of that process.

Michael Scriven
Evaluation Thesaurus, Page 1

(Davidson, 2005; Scriven, 1991)



The In a Nutshell Evaluation Description

An evaluation tries to answer

does it work and why does it work?

What do you have to do?

- Think for yourself
- Be or become independent
- Have or learn the ability to map out a study from start to finish with the knowledge that it will likely not go to plan
- Adjust to stakeholder and environmental needs
- Understand and be comfortable with the fact that you will not have any content knowledge of a majority of programs you will evaluate



Evaluation Components

The Three Aspects of Evaluation

- Criteria
- Standards
- Indicators

Criteria

- Definition
 - An assessment a program's ability to achieve its intended outcomes (i.e. does what its supposed to do) AND make a meaningful differences as a consequence to its operation.
- Example
 - A car may be worth buying if it meets the following criteria: it is reliable, has a five star safety rating, has good fuel consumption, and has the ability to self-park.

Standards

- Definition
 - The levels of performance expressed as a rating or grade
- Examples
 - *Quantitative*: Minimum of a 2.8 GPA to gain entrance into a graduate program
 - *Qualitative*: Performance in a thesis defense

Indicators

- Definition
 - Aspects that can be measured within an evaluation that may tell us what is actually going on.
- Example
 - The score on the Stanford-Binet test is an indicator of the IQ as a variable.
- Note
 - Validity and reliability are not addressed here
 - Indicators by themselves do not have to have these aspects.

The Three Purposes of Evaluation

To determine

- Merit
- Worth
- Significance

Merit

- Synonymous with **Quality**
- Asks *does something do well in what it is supposed to do?*
- Example
 - *Question:* Does the SNA course succeed in building an understanding of the content and practice of social networks?
 - *Outcome:* If so, it probably has merit. Otherwise likely not

Worth

- Synonymous with **Value**
- Asks *how valuable is this and to whom?*
- Example
 - *Question:* Do students who pass the SNA course tend to use social network analysis in their future work?
 - *Outcome:* If so, it probably has worth. Otherwise likely not

Significance

- Synonymous with **Importance**
- Asks *how important is this and to whom?*
- Example
 - *Question:* Is the SNA course necessary for the sustainability of qualified methodologists in the United States?
 - *Outcome:* If so, it probably has significance. Otherwise likely not

One Caveat!

- Most evaluation questions are not so black and white
- They include some parts of merit, worth, and significance which are often used as clues

An evaluation is generally...

- based on values (often of the person or people paying you)
- erratic (both in practice and work life)
- not well defined (and cannot be since you're dealing with people!)
- political

Private evaluation work is...

positive in that

it can be extremely lucrative

you can pick and choose what you wish to study and like working solo

you may get to travel

good for people who

are able to work with a diverse set of people

are ethical

can adjust their writing and communication based on type of audience

have a strong methodological background

enjoy diversity in content

leave biases at the door

love and thrive in uncertainty

work well in a specified timeframe

Public evaluation work is...

positive in that

you get to have a standard 40-hour workweek

you do not have to compete for studies and like working solo

you often get to stay within your home region

good for people who

are able to work with the same people everyday

are ethical

can write and communicate well to limited audiences

have strengths in certain methodological areas

enjoy homogeneity in content

understand that personal biases are part of the job

love and thrive in certainty

work well in a longer timeframe

Primary Purposes

- **Formative:** Conducted with the intent to improve
- **Summative:** Conducted with the intent to inform decision making and/or determine judgement

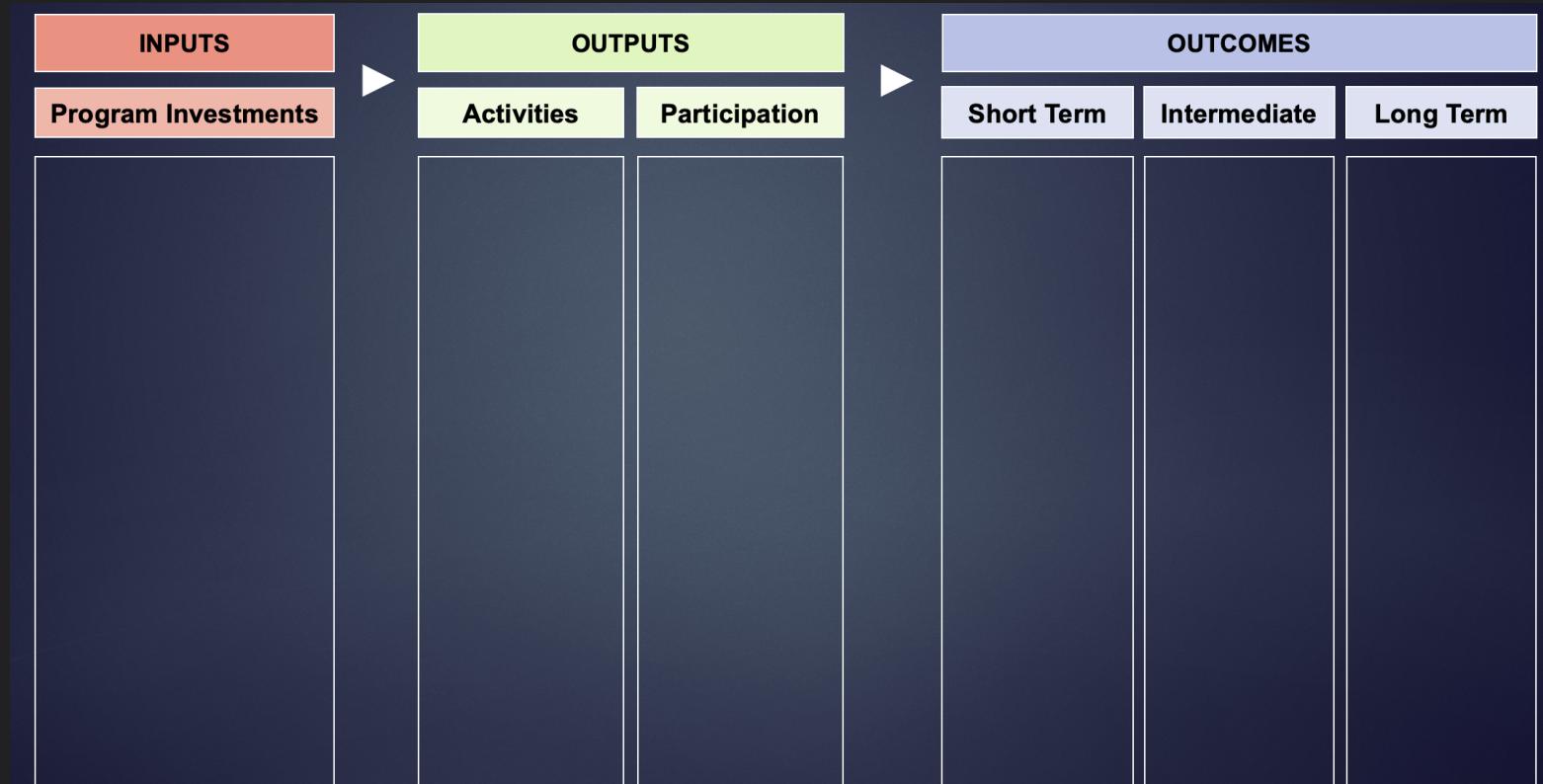
Common Types

- **Needs Assessment:** Asks *what are the needs of stakeholders and/or sponsors?*
- **Process:** Asks *is a program doing what it says its doing?*
- **Outcomes:** Asks *what is degree to which the program is having an effect on the target population's behaviors?*
- **Impact:** Asks *what is the degree the degree to which the program meets its goal(s)?*

The Evaluator's Roadmap: A Logic Model

- A logic model is a graphic depiction akin to a road map that presents the shared relationships among the resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact for your program. It is intended to depict the relationship between your program's activities and its intended effects (CDC, 2018)
- You can display change within a program by filling one out before an evaluation commences and after its conclusion, respectively

Linear example



Many other variants can be found at repositories like those at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension

Logic Model Terms

INPUTS

Program Investments

- what goes or are put into a program to make it run

OUTPUTS

Activities

- the actual tasks and how they are implemented

Participation

- who is served by the activities (e.g., stakeholders)

OUTCOMES

Short Term

- results that can be derived from immediate measurements (e.g., learning: awareness, knowledge, skills, motivations)

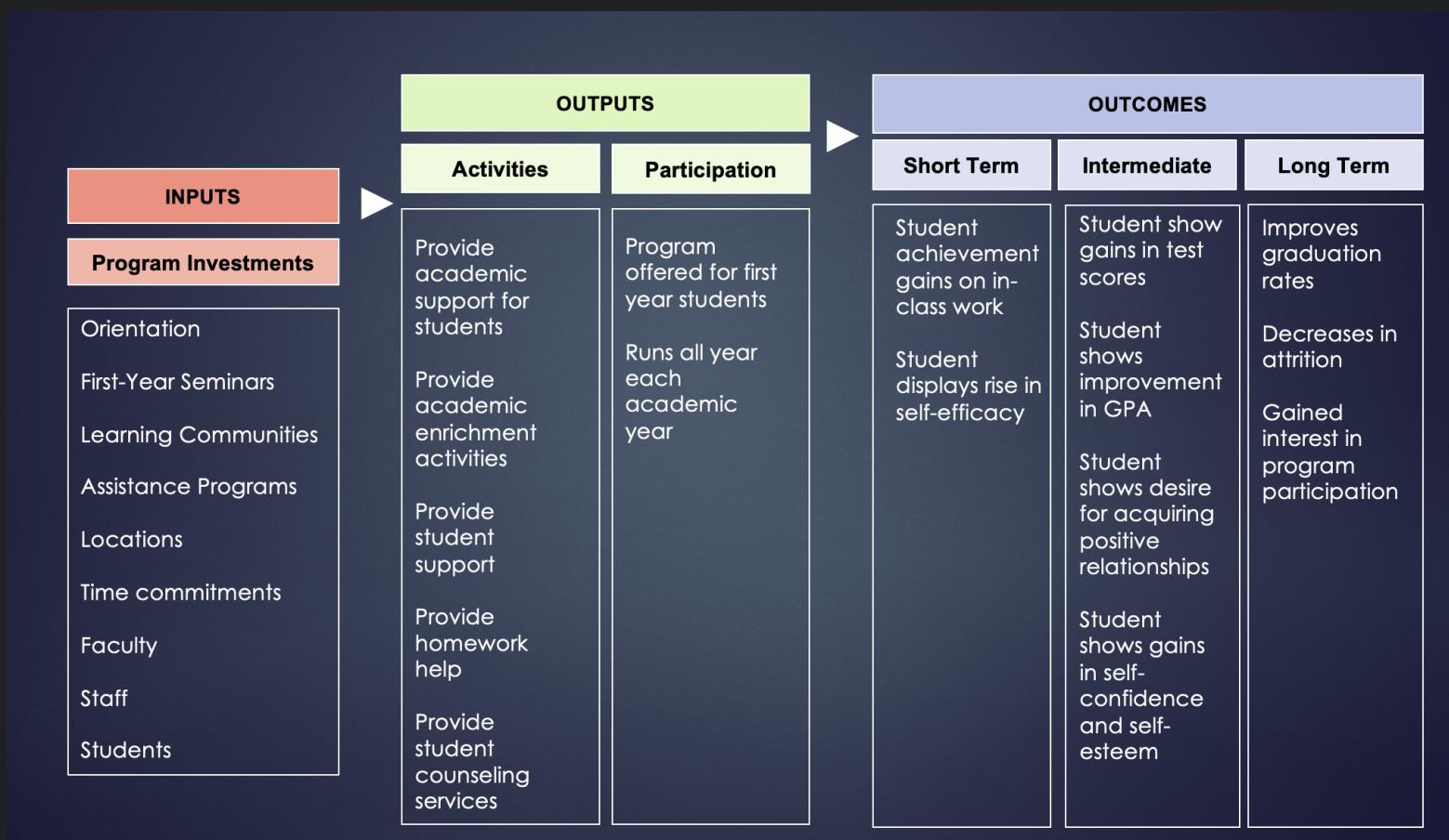
Intermediate

- results that need some other information or resource to be measured (e.g., action: behavior, practice, decisions, policies)

Long Term

- results that cannot be measured (e.g., consequences: social, economic, environmental etc.) - Typically, things one hopes will happen but can't really attribute to the program!

Example: Logic Model



Note: This is a subset of a much larger model

What Evaluation is Like



References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Program Performance and Evaluation Office. (2019, May 7). Logic Models. <https://www.cdc.gov/eval/logicmodels/index.htm>
- Davidson, E. J. (2005). *Evaluation methodology basics: The nuts and bolts of sound evaluation*. Sage.
- Scriven, M. (1991). *Evaluation thesaurus* (4th ed.). Sage.

Acknowledgement

Cartoons were created and are owned by Chris Lysy. To see more of his work including those included in this slideshow, please head over to [So what is evaluation anyway?](#)

That's Just the Tip!

If you have an interest in evaluation, questions and/or comments, please send them along to
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You may also stop by Allen Hall 5040 if you prefer a face-to-face chat.