



Common elements among most definitions include: systematic gathering of information about a program or service, an accurate description of the program, making judgments about the program to improve its effectiveness, and providing feedback to the program (Posavac, & Carey, 2003; Rossi et al., 2004; Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Program evaluation answers three simple questions:

1. **What?** What do we want to know and what is the program all about?
2. **So what?** Is the program making a difference? Is the program still relevant?
3. **Now what?** Do we make changes to improve the program? Do we continue funding the program?

### Why Evaluate?

Why do we evaluate programs? There are a number of reasons for evaluating a

program – to determine if a program is achieving its goals; to improve program delivery; to be accountable to program funders, the community, or the program clients; to increase support for a program; to inform policy; and to contribute to the base of knowledge (McNamara, 1997; Weiss, 1998). Program evaluation can help us make better decisions about the program and how we use resources, and can also increase a sense of teamwork among program staff.

### Who is Involved in a Program Evaluation?

The primary standard in evaluation is *utility*; in other words, an evaluation must be useful for the organization. To increase the utility of an evaluation, all individuals who are affected by the evaluation (stakeholders) should be identified so

that their perspectives can be included (The Joint Committee on Standards for Education Evaluation, Inc., 1994).

Who are the stakeholders in a program evaluation? Stakeholders are any people who are affected by the evaluation such as program clients, staff, managers, program funders, family members, community members, policy makers, and even program competitors.

Why should we involve stakeholders in a program evaluation? First of all, it increases the usefulness and credibility of the evaluation. Stakeholder input can strengthen evaluation design and lead to a more accurate understanding of the program. Stakeholders can be involved in an evaluation by being part of an advisory group, developing the evaluation framework, developing survey instruments, helping with data collection, doing



advocacy work, and helping to share the findings (Weiss, 1998).

## Types of Evaluation Activities

Program evaluation activities have been described in a variety of ways. A *formative* evaluation is generally designed to assist with the development of a program, where a *summative* evaluation provides information on the effectiveness of the program (Weiss, 1998). Posavac and Carey (2003) and Rossi et al. (2004) have described program evaluation in a more detailed continuum of activities, as outlined below.

The first evaluation activity is the *Needs Assessment*, where we find out if there is a need for a program, identify the needs, and determine if similar programs exist elsewhere or whether there are gaps in

services. A program is not effective if there is no need for it or if the program services do not address the need (Posavac & Carey, 2003; Rossi et al., 2004). Conducting a needs assessment is an essential first step in program development, but it is also useful in making changes in an existing program.

The second evaluation activity is *Assessing Program Theory*, or looking at the program's concept and design (Rossi et al., 2004). The program theory should be evaluated like any other part of the program, and is crucial for articulating program goals and objectives. A well-defined program theory would include assumptions about the impacts of the program; how to reach target populations; what services are needed; and an organizational plan that includes interaction between program resources, staff and program activities. Assessing the program theory can include the

development of the *Program Logic Model*, which is described in the next section.

The third evaluation activity is *Assessing Program Process*, where we look at day-to-day program delivery and management, measure client satisfaction, develop a client profile, and see if the program has reached the target population (Rossi et al., 2004).

The fourth evaluation activity is *Assessing Impact*, or seeing if the program is achieving its goals or having an impact with the intended target group. Outcomes measured should be linked to benefits from the services, not simply the use of the services (Rossi et al., 2004).

The final evaluation activity in the continuum is the *Efficiency Assessment*, or the cost of a program. An efficiency assessment can tell us how to allocate valuable resources, what the cost-benefit



ratio is, or whether the program is cost-effective (i.e. do the costs of the program justify the effects?) (Rossi et al., 2004).

The sequence of these evaluation activities is important in developing meaningful and useful evaluations. We first need to determine what the issue is, whether there is a need for the program, what is the best way to deal with the issue, how the program should be delivered, if the program is achieving its outcomes, and if the program is cost effective (Rossi et al., 2004). In essence, each evaluation activity is developmental in nature and each builds on the other.

## Evaluation Frameworks and Program Logic Models

What is an evaluation framework? An evaluation framework is basically an evaluation plan including the presentation of a clear understanding of what you need in the evaluation. An evaluation framework should include an accurate description of the program, a strategy for evaluating the program, a budget, and a time line. An evaluation framework can also include a program logic model.

The program logic model (PLM) is a tool often used in program development and program evaluation as a way to assess program theory. The PLM should be the first task completed in any evaluation as it provides a theoretical framework for the evaluation. The PLM is typically a visual representation through flow charts or diagrams that shows the relationships between program components. The PLM outlines the program purpose, why the program is important, and the intended program results (Coffman, 2005; Schmitz & Parsons, 2005). A PLM is often developed by a professional evaluator, and should be based on input from key stakeholders (staff, participants, community members) and a literature review. The PLM is meant to be flexible

and evolve as the program develops (Cooksy, Gill, & Kelly, 2001).

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2004) identified 5 basic PLM components:

1. **Barriers and resources** that could limit or enable the delivery of a program. Resources could be staff time, money, equipment and interpersonal networks, while barriers could be policies or laws, attitudes and geography (i.e., not an accessible program).
2. **Activities**, which could include a product, service or infrastructure.
3. **Outputs**: the quantification of activities, e.g.: program participation rates or number of products sold.
4. **Outcomes**: measured in immediate or intermediate time range, such as individual changes in awareness, knowledge, attitudes or behaviour.
5. **Impacts**, or long-term results from the program. Impacts are often thought of as system, societal or policy level changes.





In sum, there are a number of steps to take when conducting a program evaluation (Division of Cooperative Extension of the University of Wisconsin-Extension, 2002):

1. **Engage your stakeholders** – Who should be involved, how should they be involved?
2. **Focus the evaluation** – What do we want to know? How will we do the evaluation, and how will the findings be used?
3. **Collect information** – How will you gather information (surveys, interviews, file reviews, reports etc.) and who will be involved?
4. **Analyze and interpret your findings** – What does the information mean with respect to your program?
5. **Use the information** – Prepare a report to share the findings. How will you learn from the findings? Develop recommendations and next steps.

### An Aboriginal Research/Evaluation Framework

Evaluators have often been criticized for never visiting the program or considering the human element, relying instead on program statistics for their recommendations in their evaluations (Worthen et al., 1997). Given that one of the goals for conducting a program evaluation is to improve programming for participants based on their needs, it is crucial that program evaluations are culturally sensitive and include important contextual factors (historical, social, cultural, and environmental). Based on this reasoning, Chouinard and Cousins (2007) conducted an extensive critical review of the literature in attempts to articulate what would comprise a culturally sensitive program evaluation, including the generation of Indigenous knowledge, methodologies and participatory frameworks. These topics are reviewed below.

One of the challenges faced by Indigenous scholars has been the lack of trust that many Aboriginal communities have for research processes driven from a Western scientific perspective. Historically, non-Aboriginal researchers entered communities and conducted projects without the respect and reciprocity needed to make the research relevant and beneficial to communities. Ongoing challenges for research in Aboriginal contexts are how to: *reframe* (focus on community stimulated research matters); *rename* (incorporate Indigenous world views and realities); and *reclaim* the research environment (take control of our lives and land) (Choinard & Cousins, 2007; Smith, 1999).

Furthermore, it is imperative that an Indigenous world view be included in the evaluation framework, that community cultural protocols are understood and adhered to, that the evaluator positions him/herself by developing a relationship of trust and respect, that important issues are identified and redressed, and that the community's political, social and cultural values are appreciated and incorporated into the methodology (Smith, 1999; Steinhauer, 2002). Other contextual factors from the perspectives of community members must be considered and included in the preparation of documents and reports, such as historical events and cultural ceremonies (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999).

Many Aboriginal scholars have entered the research field questioning how research is being conducted, and have developed methodologies that are culturally sensitive and appropriate for community settings (Smith, 1999). Swisher and Tippeconnic (1999) state that it is necessary for First Nations people to be involved in *producing* research rather than participating merely as subjects. Smith (1999) echoes this concern in calling for increased participation in research by Indigenous peoples. While some Indigenous individuals have rejected



social science approaches, many have worked within the research paradigm to develop more culturally sensitive methodologies.

Indigenous researchers are expected by the Aboriginal community to follow a code of conduct. The role of the researcher may include developing a close, long-term, involved and trusting relationship with those whom they are researching (McMillan, 2004). Researchers are expected to present themselves face-to-face with community members, to listen and then speak, to share with and host people, to be generous and cautious, and not to flaunt their knowledge (Smith, 1999). This respect should then be reciprocated, and should be shared constantly in all aspects of social conduct. In addition to community expectations for researchers, various organizations have articulated formalized codes of conduct. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) included an appendix in their seminal report outlining ethical guidelines for research. These guidelines specified that

the purpose of the code was to “ensure that...appropriate respect is given to the cultures, languages, knowledge and values of Aboriginal peoples, and to the standards used by Aboriginal peoples to legitimate knowledge” (p. 325).

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and the Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) (2010) have prepared guidelines for researchers working with Aboriginal people as part of their Tri-Council Policy Statement (Chapter 9). The purpose of these guidelines is “to ensure, to the extent possible, that research involving Aboriginal people is premised in respectful relationships. It also encourages collaboration between researchers and participants” (CIHR, NSERC, & SSHRC, 2010, p. 105). The guidelines specify 22 articles and sub-articles for engaging in social or biological research with Aboriginal peoples and communities that speak to ownership of data, inclusion of Indigenous world views,

respect for traditional knowledge and individual privacy, research benefits and more. Aboriginal scholars, universities, and organizations are sensitive to the notion that researchers who work with Aboriginal communities must engage in specific protocols that are respectful, protective, and inclusive. The implications of such research methodologies are the survival of cultures, languages, and people (Smith, 1999).

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) outlined the “4 R’s” as a framework for developing academic research and procedures in an Aboriginal context, including:

1. **Respect**, or valuing the diverse Aboriginal individual, cultural and community knowledge. Respect includes understanding and practicing community protocols, being reflective and non-judgemental, being able to hear what is being said, and building on cultural, social and spiritual values that can only come from the community.
2. **Relevance** to community and cultural needs and experiences. Communities

should be part of designing the research questions as well as the methods and interpretation of findings. The researcher/evaluator must be clear about their intentions, and factual information must be useful for the local governance.

3. **Reciprocity**, where both the community and researcher/evaluator benefit from a two-way process of learning and research. The evaluator must ask the following questions: What will be left behind? What has the community learned/gained? Has knowledge been shared through the whole process?
4. **Responsibility**, where there is active empowerment for community members through full engagement and participation. Responsibility means that the evaluator continues to develop and maintain credibility with the community by considering all perspectives, and working collaboratively and sharing findings.

## A Participatory Evaluation Framework

There has been considerable work undertaken in the area of articulating ethical and respectful practices in engaging in research or evaluation with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. One such approach is the participatory approach to evaluation, which has the goal of improving the program overall rather than simply proving its efficacy. As such, an evaluation of this type is utility-driven (Provincial Health Services Authority, 2006).

Riecken, Scott and Tanaka (2006) note that participatory approaches with First Nations people should include partnership in planning, research and final presentation of research. They note that a participatory approach contributes to resiliency through the development and enhancement of relationships between students and communities. Fletcher (2003) developed a framework for a

community-based participatory research approach when working with Aboriginal communities, noting that the researcher should: acknowledge power imbalances between community and researchers; focus on relevant topics; foster autonomy and develop capacity in the community; engage community members; consider research as an opportunity to provide public education about research; and respect the ethical guidelines of that community and organizations that represent the interests of First Nations people. Fletcher (2003) also suggests that the researcher ensures that research objectives are transparent, respects local politics and structures, recognizes authorities in the community, listens closely, ensures confidentiality, uses culturally appropriate tools, and develops a comprehensive dissemination strategy. Finally, Delormier et al. (2003) outline strategies for ensuring participation in Aboriginal communities. These strategies include using incentives for participation, being present at already scheduled events in the community, responding to concerns raised throughout the process, and collaborating with other community organizations and groups. Engaging in a participatory evaluation framework along with professional and cultural codes of conduct will produce an evaluation with the greatest utility and potential for effective program enhancements.

## Conclusion

Engaging in program evaluation provides a unique opportunity to showcase program successes and identify ways to improve programming. Conclusions drawn in an evaluation must be evidence based and include an accurate description of the program and its impacts. As this review has shown, evaluations with Aboriginal peoples or programs must be culturally sensitive and include contextual factors. Many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars have articulated important concerns and identified methodologies to ensure that program evaluations and

research are conducted respectfully. Future work in program evaluations and Indigenous methodologies should be focused on ensuring that it is the norm to consider guidelines such as those articulated by the CIHR, and integrating frameworks like the “4 R’s” with existing evaluation standards as articulated by the Canadian Evaluation Society (2008). Engaging in useful, respectful program evaluations ultimately works toward improving programs to effectively meet the needs of participants, and provides exciting opportunities to learn about programs and their successes.

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