

Project Evaluation

By definition, a project has:

- a clearly defined beginning and end, with identifiable stages (or phases) between; and
- specified outputs and outcomes that are reflected in the stated goals/aims and objectives of the project.

In a nutshell, evaluation is about *making judgements of 'worth'*. In the context of educational projects then, this means judgements about how well the project's objectives have been achieved (in terms of outputs and educational outcomes), and how well the project has run as an enterprise.

An overview of the evaluation process

Most evaluations that incorporate both **formative** (i.e. 'during') and **summative** (i.e. 'after') evaluation have the following steps, although the order in which they are undertaken may vary. There may also be some retracing of steps — e.g. during planning (at Step 3), the evaluation team may feel it necessary to revisit Steps 1 and 2, revising the evaluation objectives.

Figure: The evaluation process

Steps in the process	Decision making
1. Specify, select, refine, or modify project goals and evaluation objectives. (See Fig. 2.1 'Project evaluation framework')	What is the general focus of the evaluation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is to be evaluated? • Why — what are the purposes? • Who is the evaluation for?
2. Establish standards/criteria (performance measures) where appropriate	What benchmarks or measures will be used to evaluate the success of the project?
3. Plan appropriate evaluation design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key questions that need answering? • What is feasible in terms of budget, time, available resources and expertise?
4. Select and/or develop data gathering methods	What information will be gathered? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From whom? • By whom? • How will the information be gathered?
5. Collect relevant data	
6. Process, summarise, analyse relevant data	How will the information be analysed and interpreted, and by whom? (Criteria for judging will relate to Step 2.)
7. Contrast data with evaluation standards/criteria	
8. Report and feedback results	How will the results be communicated? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To whom? • By when?

9. Assess cost-benefit/effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the benefits? • Was the investment worth it? • Who will make such judgements?
10. Reflect (evaluate) the evaluation	<p>How will the evaluation itself be evaluated?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the design be evaluated? • How will you know if the evaluation is proceeding according to plan (a management issue)? • How will the overall evaluation effort be judged?
Throughout Steps 1-10	<p>How will the evaluation be managed — in terms of identifying, allocating tasks, resources, personnel etc.?</p>

Getting started

You may feel the task ahead a rather daunting one. However, good planning will pay off in terms of generating a plan that is manageable and likely to produce outcomes of worth and practical value.

To generate a good plan means logically working through a series of issues, and this section takes you through:

- consideration of stakeholders and their concerns
- consideration of constraints
- how to translate concerns into key evaluation questions
- selection of data gathering methods to address the key questions that are to be the focus of the evaluation.

Before moving on: Consider any constraints

Before finalising the questions that will direct the evaluation, consider any constraints to the evaluation that exist, or are likely to emerge as the evaluation unfolds. They might include:

- budget and resource constraints
- time constraints
- competent staff available to carry out the evaluation
- pre-specified evaluation objectives, methodologies and/or reporting procedures
- legal or ethical restrictions
- availability of data, participants for information (e.g. if the evaluation is to occur over a semester break.)
- 'political' considerations

These factors will determine the size and scale of the evaluation and what the evaluation team can practically deal with.

'Action' questions

One main purpose of evaluation is program improvement. Some questions deal with matters the project team can readily respond to, to rectify or improve an aspect of the innovation. Other questions may focus on more general or 'big picture' outcomes not as directly linked to action that can be taken by the project team or other key stakeholders — at least in the short term. It's therefore important to ask both specific, action-oriented as well as more general, 'big picture' type questions.

Think through the possible answers to a particular question — do they give *direct clues* to changes that can be made? (i.e. Will the question actually inform change?)

'High value' questions

Some questions may be particularly useful to ask because of their high 'pay-off' because:

- there is little other information to inform in the area; hence answers will add real value to the information base
- the answers will be of great interest to the major stakeholders
- the answers will most likely significantly inform or highlight areas that can readily be improved
- the questions can be feasibly answered given the time and resources available.

(go down to the sample of Evaluation Plan Worksheet)

Worksheet: Evaluation Plan

Evaluation question	Data gathering method(s)	Data source(s)	Data collection		Analysis		Report format and audience
			Collection time (Day/month/year)	Responsible person(s)	Analysis procedure(s)	Responsible person(s)	
<i>Final report</i>							