

# Program Evaluation

## What is it?



# What is Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is the systematic collection of :

- information about program activities
- information about program characteristics
- information about program outcomes

in order to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming.

# Evaluation Challenges

- Asking the right question
- Getting the right answer
- Getting the right answer at the right time
- Getting the right answer to the right people

# The Social Context of Evaluation

- Societies spend billions of dollars on social programs to fight poverty, disease, ignorance, joblessness, mental illness, crime, hunger, inequality.....
  - How are these programs to be judged?
  - How can current activities inform future ones?
- Evaluation “*raises fundamental questions about human rationality, decision-making, and knowledge applied to the creation of a better world.*”

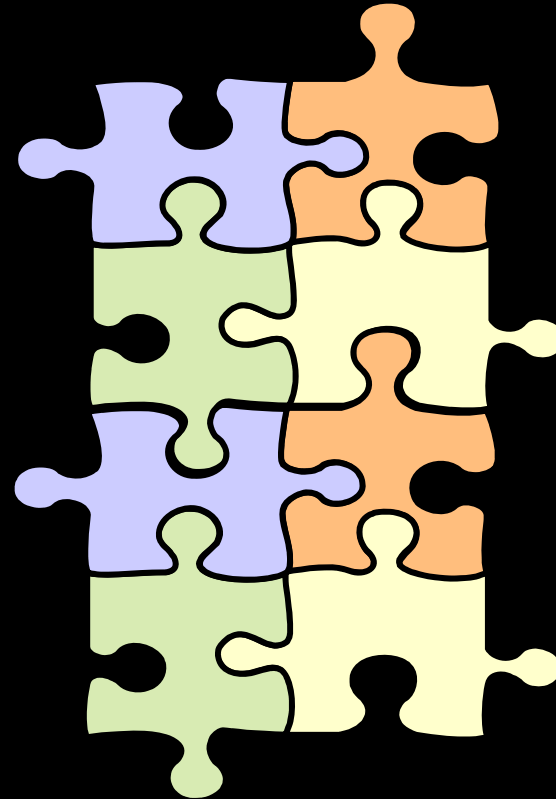
# Why Evaluation?

- The more complex the social problem, the more important it is to evaluate our attempts to alleviate it—to understand what works and what doesn't.
- The less we know about how to solve a problem, the more important it is to evaluate our progress toward our goals.
- When our knowledge is comprehensive and solid, we can solve problems easily, without much reflection. When we are uncertain, then evaluation becomes an essential tool for social progress.
- At its core, then, evaluation helps reduce uncertainty.

# The Nature of Evaluation

**Evaluation constitutes an interface between science and action; knowing and doing. It is...**

- Part science
- Part practice
- Part logic
- Part common sense
- Part management
- Part ethics
- Part politics



# What evaluation is not...

- **Measurement**

- Measurement plays a part but measurement is characteristically not concerned with improving social programs
- Measurement helps describe a program, particularly program outcomes

# What evaluation is not...

- Research

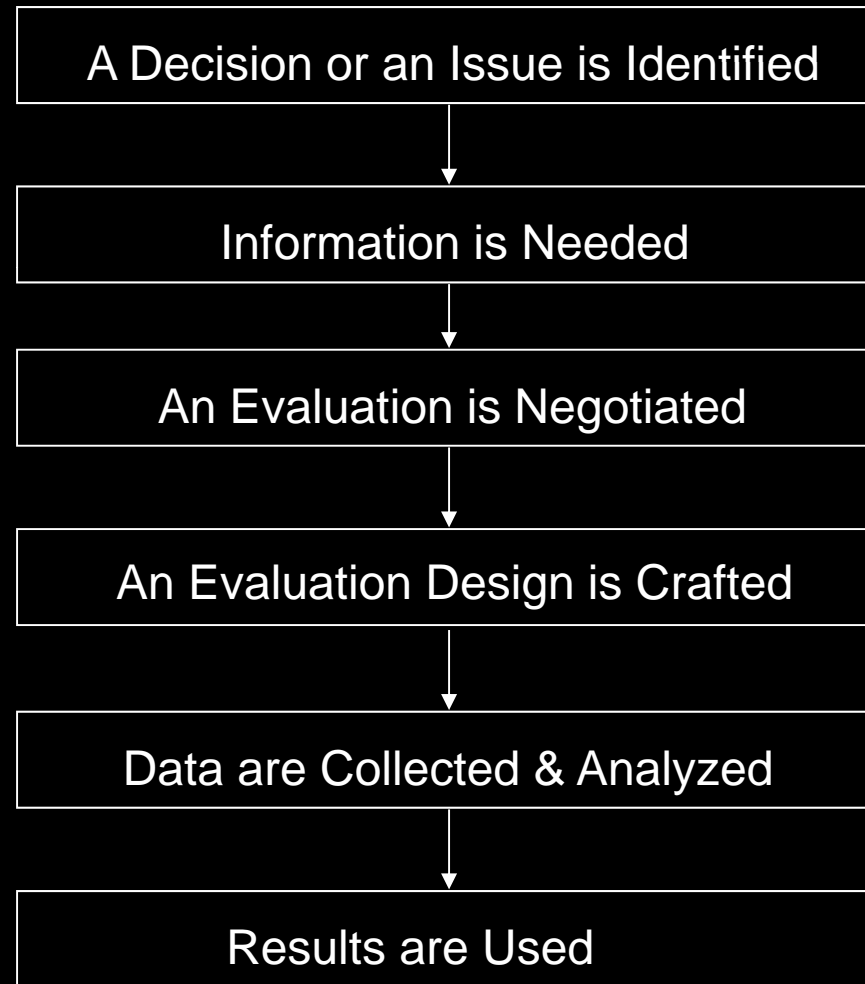
- The goal of evaluation typically not to provide generalizable knowledge although this is sometimes possible.
- Research is conclusion-oriented whereas evaluation is decision-oriented.
- Socio-political context of evaluations factored into the evaluation process whereas in research, they are factored out.



# Evaluation vs Science

- Program evaluation is undertaken to...
  - Inform decisions
  - Clarify options
  - Identify improvement
  - Provide contextualized information
  - Support action
- Evaluation is a problem-solving activity.
- Basic science is undertaken to...
  - Establish new knowledge
  - Test theories
  - Establish truth
  - Generalize across time and space
- Research is a knowledge creation activity.

# The Evaluation Process



# Evaluation Questions

- **Needs Assessment - Is this program needed?**
  - What is the scope or magnitude of the need?
  - Could a different program fulfill this need more effectively or efficiently?
  - Is the program acceptable to potential clients?
  - Do the goals and objectives of the program make sense?

# Questions continued....

- **Implementation or Process Evaluation – Is the program functioning as intended?**
  - Is the program reaching sufficient numbers of clients (coverage or saturation)?
  - Are services being delivered as intended or has there been program drift?
  - Are services being delivered with adequate intensity? (dose-response or staff burnout)
  - Is the intervention appropriately standardized across staff?
  - Are clients satisfied with the services they receive?

# Questions continued....

- **Outcome Evaluation - Is the program effective?**
  - Do clients get better, stay the same, or get worse?
  - Was this change a result of the program?
  - Are there any negative consequences to program participation?

# Internal & External Evaluators

## The In-house vs Out-house Issue



### Internal evaluators

- Embedded within programs so high knowledge of context
- Often involved in program improvement
- Close informal relationships with program staff
- Embeddedness may bias the evaluation
- The current trend is toward self-assessment and internal evaluation



### External evaluators

- Typically commissioned by external agents for accountability purposes
- Emphasis is typically program effectiveness and efficiency
- Removed from program context
- Evaluation may be limited by lack of contextual knowledge
- Often considered to be threatening

# Lessons in Evaluation

- Being evaluated is stressful, so being an evaluator can be too
- There is not just one right answer—there are many right answers
- Let's take it to the next level
- Goal is to learn out to do this work better