Evaluation Myths, Misconceptions, and Mistakes

Lori A. Wingate

April 17, 2012
myth, n.

2. a. A widespread but untrue or erroneous story or belief

Oxford English Dictionary
Myth 1: SMART goals are smart
Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Relevant
Time-bound
Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Relevant
Time-bound
Assignable
Achievable
Action-oriented
Appropriate
Ambitious
Aligned
Agreed-upon
Specific  Measurable  Attainable  Relevant  Time-bound  Realistic  Results-oriented
Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Relevant
Time-bound
Timely
Time-specific
Trackable
Tangible
How will you demonstrate that your program contributed to the change you intend? A well-crafted logic model can assert it is reasonable to claim that your program made a substantive contribution to your intended change. When programs operate in real communities where influences and forces are beyond your control, evaluation is generally more about documenting a program’s contribution than about proving something. Community-based initiatives operate in complex environments where the scientific certainty of “proof” is seldom attainable. This is where logic models can be especially helpful.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Exercise 1 will use the Basic Logic Model Development Template. In particular, you will use the information presented in the gray text boxes that follow about the Mytown example program to determine what results are intended for this program. Example information about outcomes, impacts, and outputs are provided. You will fill in the blank Basic Logic Model Development Template to illustrate first the outcomes and impacts sought and then the outputs. You can then look at the completed template on page 25 to see compare your interpretation with that produced by the Mytown folks.

**Exercise 1 uses the Basic Logic Model Development Template**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Short- &amp; Long-Term Outcomes</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In order to accomplish our set of activities we will need the following.</td>
<td>In order to address our problem or asset we will conduct the following activities:</td>
<td>We expect that once completed or under way these activities will produce the following evidence of service delivery.</td>
<td>We expect that if completed or ongoing these activities will lead to the following changes in 1-3 then 4-6 years:</td>
<td>We expect that if completed these activities will lead to the following changes in 7-10 years:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcomes and Impacts should be SMART:
- Specific
- Measurable
- Action-oriented
- Realistic
- Timed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Short- &amp; Long-Term Outcomes</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In order to accomplish our set of activities we will need the following:</td>
<td>In order to address our problem or asset we will conduct the following activities:</td>
<td>We expect that once completed or underway these activities will produce the following evidence of service delivery:</td>
<td>We expect that if completed or ongoing these activities will lead to the following changes in 1–3 then 4–6 years:</td>
<td>We expect that if completed these activities will lead to the following changes in 7–10 years:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcomes and Impacts should be SMART:

- **Specific**
- **Measurable**
- **Action-oriented**
- **Realistic**
- **Timed**
“We strive hard for every participant to achieve their goals and dreams by nurturing their self-esteem as they grow up. It is our goal that 85% will feel motivated or good about themselves and 15% will not.”

from Chapter 7 of *Utilization-Focused Evaluation* by Michael Quinn Patton
“By separating the process of goals clarification from the process of selecting indicators, it is possible for program staff to focus first on what they are really trying to accomplish and to state their goals and objectives as explicitly as possible without regard to measurement.”

from Chapter 7 of Utilization-Focused Evaluation by Michael Quinn Patton
“By separating the process of goals clarification from the process of selecting indicators, it is possible for program staff to focus first on what they are really trying to accomplish and to state their goals and objectives as explicitly as possible without regard to measurement.”

from Chapter 7 of Utilization-Focused Evaluation by Michael Quinn Patton
Myth 2:
It’s *always* important to measure outcomes
Why measure outcomes?

To see if programs really make a difference in the lives of people.

*Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach* by the United Way of America
misconception, n.

a view or opinion that is false or inaccurate because based on faulty thinking or understanding

Oxford English Dictionary
Misconception 1: formative evaluation = process evaluation
Misconception 1: summative evaluation = outcome evaluation
formative evaluation

is typically conducted during the development or improvement of a program... with the intent to improve.
summative evaluation

...is conducted *after* completion of the program... and for the benefit of some *external* audience.... It should not be confused with outcome evaluation, which is simply an evaluation *focused on* outcomes rather than on process— which could be either formative or summative.

*Evaluation Thesaurus* by Michael Scriven
process evaluation

focuses on the activities and events that occur between a specification of inputs and occurrence or measurement of outputs.
outcome evaluation

focus[es] on outcomes rather than process or input.

*Evaluation Thesaurus* by Michael Scriven

Outcomes are changes, results, and impacts....

*Encyclopedi*a of Evaluation
edited by Sandra Mathison
Misconception 2:
formative
=
qualitative
Misconception 2: summative = quantitative
mistake, n.
a. A misconception about the meaning of something; a thing incorrectly done or thought; an error of judgement.

Oxford English Dictionary
Mistake:

metaevaluation
=

meta-analysis
metaevaluation

is the evaluation of evaluations.

*Evaluation Thesaurus*, Michael Scriven

...must not be confused with meta-analysis.

*Evaluation Encyclopedia*, Michael Scriven
[More] Discussion