

Evaluation Myths, Misconceptions, and Mistakes

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**Evaluation Café
The Evaluation Center
Western Michigan University**

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

Assignable

Measurable

Achievable

Action-oriented

Attainable

Appropriate

Ambitious

Relevant

Aligned

Time-bound

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

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

Outcomes and Impacts should be SMART:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Action-oriented
- Realistic
- Timed

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“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

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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.

Evaluation Thesaurus by Michael Scriven

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.

Encyclopedia of Evaluation
edited by Sandra Mathison

outcome evaluation

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

Evaluation Thesaurus by Michael Scriven

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

Encyclopedia 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

