

Evaluation Research

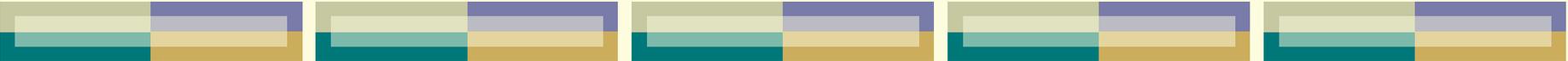
Note:

Some of the material on these slides is derived from the Centers for Disease Control

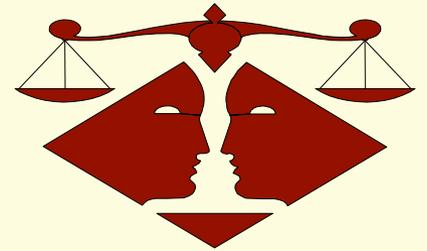
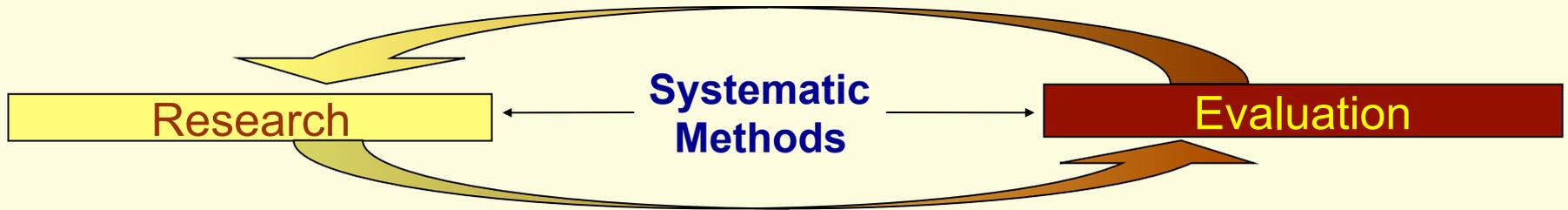


Definitions

- **Evaluation research, sometimes called *program evaluation*, refers to a research purpose rather than a specific method.**
- **This purpose is to evaluate the impact of social interventions such as new teaching methods, innovations in parole, and a host of others.**
- **Evaluation research is a form of applied research—it is intended to have some real-world effect.**

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- **Many methods, like surveys and experiments can be used in evaluation research.**
 - **In recent years, the field of evaluation research has become an increasingly popular and active research specialty, as reflected in textbooks, courses, and projects.**

Research vs. Evaluation



- Production of generalizable knowledge
- Researcher-derived questions
- Paradigm stance
- More controlled setting
- Clearer role
- Often published
- Clearer allegiance

- Knowledge intended for use
- Program- or funder-derived questions
- Judgmental quality
- Action setting
- Role conflicts more likely
- Often not published
- Multiple allegiances



**“Research seeks to *prove*,
evaluation seeks to *improve*...”**

M.Q. Patton



Surveillance & Monitoring vs. Program Evaluation

- **Surveillance - tracks diseases, problems, or risky behaviors**
- **Monitoring - tracks changes in program outcomes over time**
- **Evaluation - seeks to understand specifically why these changes occur**



Topics Appropriate to Evaluation Research

- Evaluation research is appropriate whenever some social intervention occurs or is planned.
- Social intervention is an action taken within a social context for the purpose of producing some intended result.
- In its simplest sense, *evaluation research* is the process of determining whether a social intervention has produced the intended result.
- The topics appropriate for evaluation research are limitless.
- The questions appropriate for evaluation research are of great practical significance: jobs, programs, and investments as well as values and beliefs.



What Can be Evaluated?

- **Direct service interventions**
- **Community mobilization efforts**
- **Research initiatives**
- **Surveillance & monitoring systems**
- **Policy development activities**
- **Problem/crisis investigations**
- **Client Assessments**
- **Communication systems**
- **Infrastructure-building**
- **Training and educational services & staff qualifications**
- **Administrative systems**

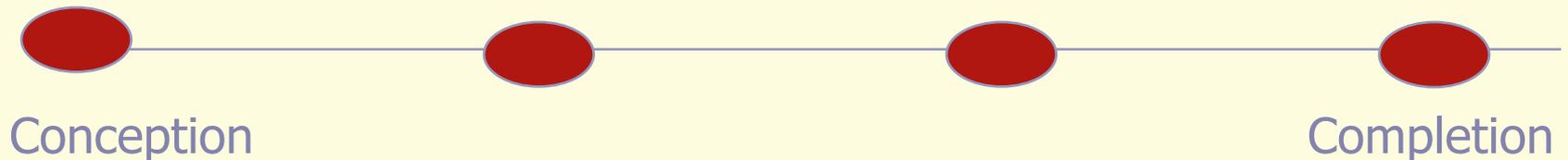
When to Conduct Evaluation?

Planning a
NEW program

Assessing a
DEVELOPING program

Assessing a
STABLE/MATURE Program

Assessing a Program
that has ENDED



The **stage of program development** influences the reason for program evaluation.



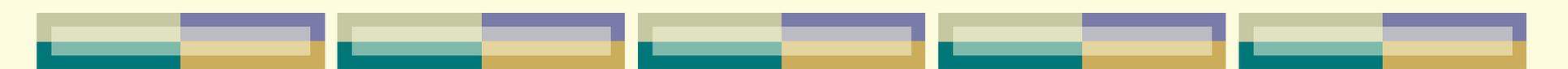
Why Evaluate Programs?

- To **gain insight** about a program and its operations – to see where we are going and where we are coming from, and to find out what works and what doesn't
- To **improve practice** – to modify or adapt practice to enhance the success of activities
- To **assess effects** – to see how well we are meeting objectives and goals, how the program benefits the community, and to provide evidence of effectiveness
- To **build capacity** - increase funding, enhance skills, strengthen accountability



Steps in Program Evaluation

- **Step 1: Engage Stakeholders**
- **Step 2: Describe the Program**
- **Step 3: Focus the Evaluation Design**
- **Step 4: Gather Credible Evidence**
- **Step 5: Justify Conclusion**
- **Step 6: Ensure Use & Share Lessons Learned**



Identifying Stakeholders

- **Who are the stakeholders?**
 - **Persons involved in program operations**
 - **Persons served or affected by the program**
 - **Intended users of evaluation findings**
- **What is their interest in the program?**
 - **Do they support the program?**
 - **Are they skeptical about or antagonistic toward the program?**



Identifying Stakeholders

- **Persons Involved in Program Operations**
 - **Staff and Partners**
- **Persons affected or served by the program**
 - **Clients, their families and social networks, providers and community groups**
- **Intended users of the evaluation findings**
 - **Policy makers, managers, administrators, advocates, funders, and others**
- **Be Sure to Include both Supporters and Skeptics!**



Engaging Stakeholders

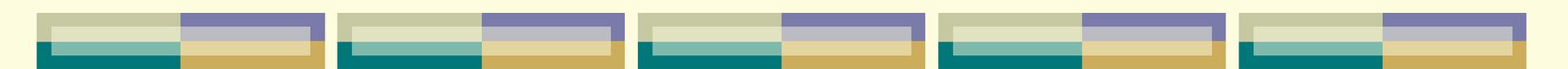
Stakeholders should be involved in...

- **Describing program activities, context, and priorities**
- **Defining problems**
- **Selecting evaluation questions and methods**
- **Serving as data sources**
- **Defining what constitutes the “proof” of success**
- **Interpreting findings**
- **Disseminating information**
- **Implementing results**



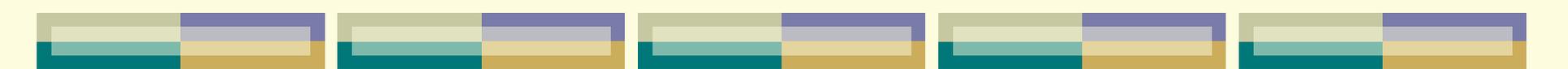
Working with Stakeholders

- **Identify stakeholders for your program**
 - **Those involved in program operations**
 - **Persons served or affected by the program**
 - **Intended users of evaluation findings**
- **Think about which ones you need most for...**
 - **Credibility**
 - **Implementation**
 - **Advocacy**
 - **Funding**
- **List ways to keep them engaged**



Formulating the Problem: Issues of Measurement

- **Problem:** What is the purpose of the intervention to be evaluated?
- This question often produces vague results.
- A common problem is measuring the “unmeasurable.”
- Evaluation research is a matter of finding out whether something is there or not there, whether something happened or did not happen.
- To conduct evaluation research, we must be able to operationalize, observe, and measure.



What is the outcome, or the *response variable*?

- **If a social program is intended to accomplish something, we must be able to measure that something.**
- **It is essential to achieve agreements on definitions in advance.**
- **In some cases you may find that the definitions of a problem and a sufficient solution are defined by law or by agency regulations; if so you must be aware of such specifications and accommodate them.**



Operationalizing Success/Failure

- **Potentially one of the most taxing aspects of evaluation research is determining whether the program under review succeeded or failed. Definitions of “success” and “failure” can be rather difficult.**



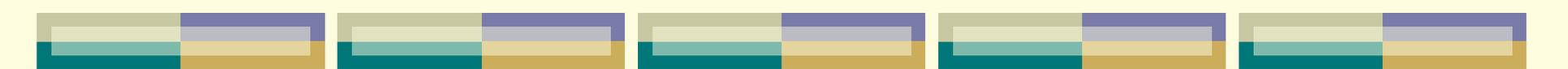
Cost-Benefit Analysis

- **How much does the program cost in relation to what it returns in benefits?**
 - **If the benefits outweigh the cost, keep the program going.**
 - **If the reverse, change it or ‘junk it’ .**
 - **Unfortunately this is not an appropriate analysis to make if thinking only in terms of money.**
- **Ultimately, the criteria of success and failure are often a matter of agreement.**
- **The people responsible for the program may commit themselves in advance to a particular outcome that will be regarded as an indication of success.**



Measurement in Evaluation

- **Researchers must take measurement quite seriously in evaluation research, carefully determining all the variables to be measured and getting appropriate measures for each.**
- **Such decisions are often not purely scientific ones.**
- **Evaluation researchers often must work out their measurement strategy with the people responsible for the program being evaluated.**
- **There is also a significant political aspect.**



Additional Issues

● *The Social Context*

- **Evaluation research has a special propensity for running into problems.**
 - **Logistical problems**
 - **Ethical problems**



Implications

- **Three important reasons why the implications of the evaluation research results are not always put into practice.**
 - **The implications may not always be presented in a way that the non-researchers can understand.**
 - **Evaluation results sometimes contradict deeply held beliefs**
 - **Vested interests in the programs underway**