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A Down-to-Earth Guide to Planning and Completing Your Evaluation

Originally Created for the Lumina Summer Grantees Meeting Evaluation Workshop for Minority-Serving Institutions of Higher Education, July 2012 Leesburg, VA

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Outline

- **Background**
  - **Why evaluate?**
  - **What are the main types of evaluation?**

- **A made-up learning example: Evaluating the XYZ project**

- **Good evaluation reporting**

- **Common evaluation pitfalls**

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Why Evaluate (and for Whom)?

Purpose	Audience
Comply with funder requirements	The funder (foundation, government, your institution, other)
Document project outcomes and grantee capabilities	Current and potential funders (for proposals), to attract partners or help form collaborations
Improve practice	Your own or other departments, institutions, and stakeholders
Test effectiveness to study "what works"	Internal and external policymakers, society (e.g., "evidence-based practices")
Contribute to knowledge	"The field" (funders, policymakers, practitioners, researchers, academia)

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What Evaluation Design?

Issue	Alternatives
Type	Formative (how can we improve?) or summative (how did we do?)
Focus	Implementation (what was done and why), outcome (meeting goals), or impact (effectiveness)
Rigor (level of evidence)	Experimental (randomized, controlled trial), quasi-experimental (pre-post or comparison group), or descriptive (case study, ethnography)
Methods	Quantitative or qualitative; multiple (more than one method) or mixed (combine/integrate methods)
Ethos	Utilization-focused, participatory, empowerment, etc.
Perspective	Internal, external

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Six Practical Questions for Planning Evaluations

- **What is the purpose and who is our audience?**

- **What is our project trying to accomplish? How?**

- **What are our research questions?**

- **What types and sources of data can address each research question?**

- **What is our evaluation budget?**

- **How much time do we have?**

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An Example

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Evaluating the "XYZ" Project

- **The problem**

  – **Taking developmental writing and math courses adds time and cost to completing a degree, thus reducing the number of minority students who complete a degree**

- **The project**

  – **Provide financial incentives to students for completing developmental courses**

  – **Offer student supports to stay in college**

- **The grant**

  – **3 years**

  – **$100,000 per year**

  – **$40,000 (total across all 3 years) to be used for evaluation**
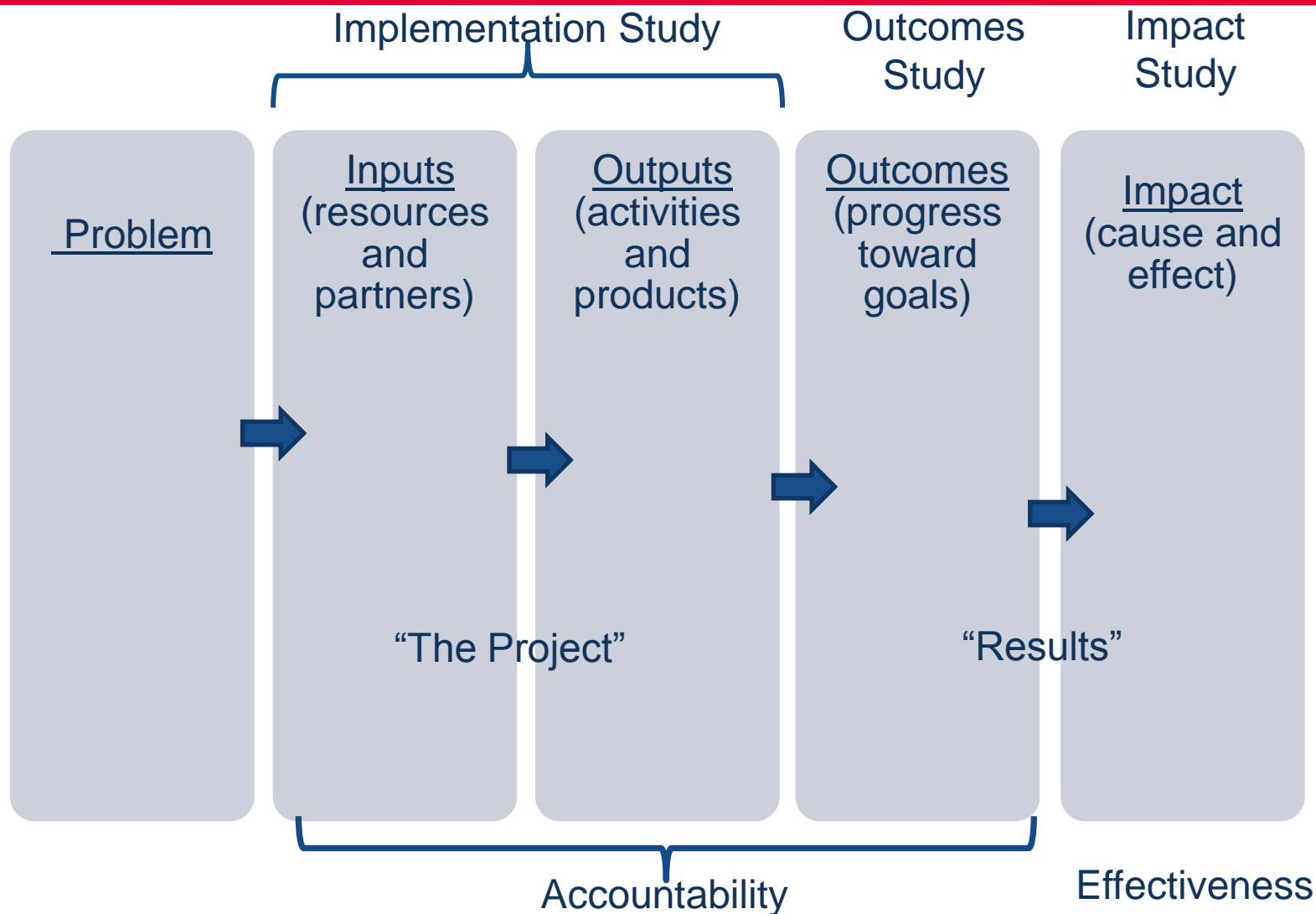
Why Evaluate XYZ, and for Whom?

- **Why evaluate?**

  - **The XYZ funder requires an evaluation**

  - **We want to contribute knowledge on**

    - The effectiveness of incentives
    - Ways to identify and provide student supports
    - How to implement incentives, assessments, and supports

- **Who are the evaluation audiences?**

  - **The funder**

  - **Our faculty and institution leadership**

  - **Other minority-serving institutions, other higher education institutions, and future potential funders**

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Design, Plan, and Conduct the Evaluation

1. **Create a logic model**

2. **Draft research questions**

3. **Select an appropriate design and data sources**

4. **Plan the budget, schedule, and products**

5. **Conduct the evaluation**

6. **Write a report**

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Step 1: Create a Logic Model

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The XYZ Logic Model

Problem	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes
•Failure to complete developmental education in timely way or at all •Faculty object to paying student incentives	•Funds used to pay incentives •Financial aid staff who will operate incentives •Project staff who will educate faculty	•Assignment to XYZ or no XYZ •No. of students receiving incentives •No. of faculty educated about incentives	•Higher rate of developmental education completion •Greater persistence in college •Higher rate of degree completion •Increases in faculty awareness and support of incentives •Increased capacity to operate incentives and assessments, and provide supports
•Time to degree is longer •Staying in school longer is costly to students	•Assessment survey to identify student needs •Student services staff who will asses and refer students to assistance •Public transportation and child care assistance available in the community	•No. of assessments completed •No. of referrals to assistance •No. of students receiving assistance	

Step 2: Develop Research Questions

1. Can financial incentives increase the number of students who complete developmental education and move on to higher level courses?

2. Can assessment tools identify supports needed by individual students?

3. Can colleges and universities successfully administer incentives, assessments, and supports?

4. Do developmental education faculty understand the need for, and support, incentives for selected students?

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The Ultimate Research Question...

5. Can financial incentives and student supports increase college completion for minority students?

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The Ultimate Research Question...

5. Can financial incentives and student supports increase college completion for minority students?

This is they key issue you are trying to address, and your funder will want you to acknowledge it, but…

- Three years is NOT enough time to track college completion (and XYZ implementation may be slower than you expect)

- Answering this question requires a level of evaluation rigor and a sample size that are unrealistic with this budget

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Step 3: Select Appropriate Evaluation Design

- **The XYZ program and evaluation team made these choices:**

  – **Type: Formative (using some early data to refine the project) and summative**

  – **Focus: Implementation and outcomes**

  – **Rigor: Descriptive (with some pre-post and comparison methods)**

  – **Method: Multiple (qualitative and quantitative data)**

  – **Ethos: Utilization-focused**

  – **Perspective: Internal**

XYZ Research Questions and Data Sources

	Financial Aid and Student Services Interviews	Student Focus Groups	Faculty Survey (Pre-Post)	Project Documents	Student Data
1. Do incentives increase completion?		X			X
2. Does faculty understand and support incentives?			X		
3. Can assessments be used to identify supports students need?		X		X	
4. Can colleges administer incentives and assessments?	X	X		X	

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Step 4: Plan the Evaluation

- **Develop a budget**

- **Set a schedule and deliverables**
    - **Data collection instruments needed by…**
    - **Data collection to occur at…**
    - **Data ready for analysis by…**
    - **Reports due…**

- **Develop data collection instruments and agreements**
    - **Pilot test instruments and refine**
    - **Get buy-in from Institutional Research Department or other data providers**

Step 5: Conduct the Evaluation

- **Collect data**

- **Examine the quality of incoming data**

- **Prepare, explore, and analyze data**

- **Interpret your data for chosen audiences (refine research questions if needed)**

- **Write a report**

At all points (monthly or quarterly): Assess actual progress
and adjust your plans as needed

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Step 6: Effective Evaluation Reports

- **Evaluation reports must include:**

  - **Background information for the reader**

  - **Descriptions of research questions, evaluation design, analysis methods, and data sources used**

  - **Findings**

    - Narrative discussions

    - Statistics

    - Tables or charts

  - **Interpretation – what the findings mean to you and your audience(s)**

  - **A clear statement of limitations**

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Limitations: Every Evaluation Has Them!

- **Study limitations:**

    - **Unknown reliability and validity of instruments and measures**

    - **Sample selection method, size, and attrition**

    - **Data quality (non-response, missing variables)**

    - **Level of evidence possible with your design**

- **Address limitations in your design and reporting:**

    - **Use existing, tested measures or scales when possible**

    - **Be alert to potential biases due to your sample**

    - **Triangulate findings across multiple data sources**

    - **Don't oversell findings**

    - **Disclose known limitations in your reports**

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Common Evaluation Mistakes

- **Trying to do too much**

- **Failing to get buy-in from essential partners**

- **Waiting too long to plan your evaluation**

- **Waiting too long to begin collecting data**

- **Measuring outcomes you can't change**

- **Not measuring things you are changing**

- **Failing to document implementation**

- **Failure to report and share results effectively**

Today: Can We Help You…

- **Select evaluation types and audiences?**

- **Formulate research questions?**

- **Identify specific measures, instruments, data sources?**

- **Assess the quality of your existing data?**

- **Suggest analysis methods?**

- **Identify and address limitations?**

- **Develop a report outline?**

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