Framework and Guidelines for Program Evaluation at the US Small Business Administration

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Executive Summary

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has recognized that program evaluation is vital to ensuring an effective and efficient organization that best supports the needs of the small business community. Evaluations can help program managers better identify outcomes and impacts of services, reconsider delivery methods and operations, or support a review of customer service gaps.

Prior to FY 2016, the SBA did not have a coordinated program evaluation function or structured support to prioritize and conduct evaluations. To address this gap, the SBA established a program evaluation team within the Office of Program Performance, Analysis and Evaluation (OPPAE) to develop guidance, provide technical assistance to program managers, oversee an enterprise learning agenda, and monitor and support independent evaluations.

In FY 2016, the program evaluation team conducted an internal study and best practice review of federal partners to determine how an evaluation function could be most successfully deployed at the SBA. As a result, the Agency established a program evaluation framework that governs its program evaluation activities. This 2022 update highlights new developments in evaluation at the SBA and in government, including emphasizing equity as a goal in program evaluation.

SBA Program Evaluation Integration

The SBA manages more than 30 programs, which are defined as "a set of planned activities directed to bring about a specific change to an identified audience."[1] The SBA administers these programs, which support key stakeholders (e.g., entrepreneurs and small businesses) and outcomes (e.g., job creation and retention, revenue growth).

Program evaluation supports senior leaders in understanding whether programs are working effectively and efficiently, and whether they are serving the interests of small businesses and the economy as intended by their governing statutes. Moreover, the SBA's program evaluation function promotes operational effectiveness, accountability, and transparency in line with the Agency's mission. Through the SBA's program evaluation function, program managers have support to conduct quality program evaluations that can better inform senior leadership. If a program is not operating as intended, the SBA can reshape policy and program activities based on evidence.[2]

Furthermore, program evaluation has been aligned with SBA's performance management functions by

[1]Smith, M.F. 1989. *Evaluability Assessment: A Practical Approach*. Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

[2]The term "evidence-based decision making" has grown in usage over the past decade in the Federal Government, with congressional and presidential aims to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of programs and spending. It has achieved support as a smart policy tool, as witnessed through the establishment of the Evidence-Based Policymaking Commission Act of 2016 and the following Office of Management and Budget memos: M-10-01 *Increased Emphasis on Program Evaluations,* M-10-32 *Evaluating Programs for Efficacy and Cost-Efficiency,* M-13-17 *Next Steps in the Evidence and Innovation Agenda,* M-12-14 *Use of Evidence and Evaluation in the 2014 Budget,* M-14-06 *Guidance for Providing and Using Administrative Data for Statistical Purposes*, M-19-23 *Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance,* M-20-12 *Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices,* and M-21-27 *Evidence-Based Policymaking: Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans*

promoting the use of rigorous social science methods and existing Agency planning, decision support, and performance reporting activities. Although performance management and program evaluation are both decision-support functions, each area answers different questions. Performance management supports the ongoing monitoring of programs to describe ***what*** level of performance a program is achieving, whereas program evaluation involves systematic methods to understand ***why*** programs are performing at a certain level. These tools complement one another and are both parts of building a portfolio of evidence.

Through this framework, appropriate evaluation and research approaches will help answer questions of strategic importance to the Agency. These approaches are governed by the methods developed by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) and meet the standards on the use of evidence as enacted through the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act (GPRAMA) of 2010 and the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018.

Through the SBA's performance management system, program managers set goals, objectives, and measures in the Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan, support decision-making through Quarterly Performance Reviews (Deep Dives), annual strategic objective reviews, and weekly and monthly dashboards, and report on performance and evidence in the Annual Performance Report and Agency Financial Report. Although these tools are useful to support decisions and improve outcomes, the SBA has recognized a need to conduct comprehensive evaluations and to use evaluation results to improve program operations and service delivery.

This framework outlines the necessary steps the Agency has taken to prioritize, invest in, and use the results of program evaluations. Along with the development of evidence to inform decision-making and program improvement, the process of conducting program evaluations creates a mechanism for SBA employees to support a program's design more fully. Useful evaluation questions and methods that yield valid and reliable data must be developed in coordination with program managers.

With stakeholder participation built into the program evaluation, evidence can be gathered, and action items can be established. As a result, SBA employees will be more engaged in their program's operations and delivery to better support outcomes for small businesses.[3]

In sum, the SBA's program evaluation function helps to:

- Support greater senior leadership decision-making through more robust evidence.
- Improve program accountability and effectiveness.
- Create a culture of continuous improvement.
- Engage stakeholders in program operations and service delivery.

[3]Stakeholder engagement is observed as an important characteristic of a high-performing organization. While employee engagement is not the intended result of a program evaluation, it is a positive byproduct that can further energize and deliver services more effectively and efficiently.

Chapter 1: Program Evaluation Core Activities

The SBA program evaluation function follows three core evaluation activities for each new evaluation: planning and preparation; conducting and monitoring; and disseminating and implementing findings. The SBA established these core practices through internal interviews and benchmarks of other agencies.

Plan and Prepare

Generally, program evaluation teams are comprised of a lead program evaluator, a project liaison of the program to be evaluated, and an independent party (i.e., often a contractor; however, in some instances, a research university or external party may be used) conducting the evaluation. An executive champion (senior executive) must also be designated to ensure its success. The executive champion must serve as a program evaluation advisor to ensure that the evaluation meets the Agency and program office's needs. The executive champion partners with the SBA program evaluator, project liaison, and independent contractor throughout the evaluation (each of these roles are further discussed in the sections below).

Before a program evaluation can be successfully launched, trust between the program's stakeholders and the team conducting the evaluation must be established. The program undertaking the evaluation is referred to as an ***evaluand***. Stakeholders of the evaluand should be assured that the evaluator will focus on program improvement and partner with them, as opposed to conducting an audit. Specifically, program stakeholders need to trust that evaluation is something that is being done with them and not to them. The evaluation must be a collaborative and continuous improvement effort of program operations and service delivery.

Establishing trust between the evaluator and the program's stakeholders requires ongoing communication and collaboration. Trust can be cultivated in the beginning of the evaluation process through the development of learning priorities—sometimes formalized as program learning agendas—and logic models. Learning agendas are continuous improvement tools that create a structure for a program to consider its evaluation priorities by identifying the questions that will most likely lead to greater program efficiency and effectiveness when answered. Program learning priorities, or program-level learning agendas, must also align with priority questions outlined in the SBA's Enterprise Learning Agenda—a "roadmap" of agency-level evidence-building and research priorities. Logic models, which can be developed or updated in the early stages of evaluation, are a tool that outlines a program's theory of change (i.e., how a program operates to produce desired outcomes). Through identifying learning priorities and understanding the program's theory of change, evaluators can properly scope the evaluation questions and collaboratively develop them to promote performance improvement.

The process of identifying program learning priorities supports collaborative, self-focused discussion about questions the program stakeholders would like answered to inform program improvements. To identify learning priorities, the program evaluator must gather the stakeholders, review the literature to determine what is known, identify and prioritize the questions based on their alignment with the Enterprise Learning Agenda and on their potential to enhance program effectiveness and efficiency, develop a plan or evaluation design to answer these questions, conduct studies and analyses, and implement the findings through an implementation plan. The evaluation questions developed in this process should ensure that key information can be used by decision-makers.

Logic modeling helps program managers articulate the "theory of program change." As needed, program evaluators partner with program staff to compile a comprehensive list of the program's resources, activities, customers, deliverables, and measurable goals. These goals will focus on short-term (knowledge/awareness), intermediate-term (behavior), and long-term (change of condition) outcomes.

During the performance management cycle, SBA program evaluators work with their corresponding performance analysts to engage programs about questions that could help inform senior leadership decision-making and determine the current state of evidence. Annual calls for evaluation proposals take place in June of each year, and program evaluators and performance analysts work with program offices throughout the performance cycle to develop ideas for future evaluations.

To ensure that SBA project liaisons and other program evaluation team members have the knowledge and ability to participate in an evaluation, an SBA program evaluator is available to conduct trainings, as appropriate, throughout the year. The SBA builds training guides from resources available within the federal evaluation network and customizes them for SBA programs. To identify program evaluation practices from other agencies and adopt them for the SBA, the Agency incorporated key GAO guidelines into its framework.[4]

Conduct and Monitor

After the planning and preparation phase, the SBA conducts and monitors its program evaluations. The SBA uses independent contractors and other third-party evaluators (e.g., academic researchers, federal statistical agencies that match an organization's administrative data, and think tanks) to conduct program evaluations with active involvement of program staff, customers, and other stakeholders.

After evaluation teams have been formed, evaluation questions must be scoped with active participation of program management, including the executive champion. An SBA lead program evaluator serves as a technical expert to guide the evaluation team. This individual also serves as the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) of each evaluation study. The SBA's lead program evaluator provides status updates to the Performance Improvement Officer, Chief Evaluation Officer, and the Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice.[5] The program evaluation team must have active participants throughout the evaluation to ensure its success.

Every program evaluation follows a standard process that is incorporated in the statement of work for the contractor or researcher. This standard procedure plays an important role in the evaluation function at the SBA. The steps of the evaluation process are as follows:

- Develop or update a logic model or theory of change.
- Define the criteria and develop evaluation questions in alignment with the SBA Enterprise Learning Agenda.
- Assess the questions to determine if the scope is reasonable and whether there is sufficient data to answer these questions.

[4]GAO. 2003. Program Evaluation: *An Evaluation Culture and Collaborative Partnerships Help Build Agency Capacity*. Report No. GAO-03-454. Washington, DC: GAO.

[5]The SBA has established a Community of Practice to share best practices on program evaluation and evidence-building with program managers and analysts.

- Design an evaluation methodology with input from program management.
- Establish a quality assurance plan (QAP).
- Conduct the program evaluation (data collection).
- Review preliminary results with the evaluation team.
- Integrate the findings into the Annual Performance Report, Strategic Objective Reviews, Strategic Plan, Annual Evaluation Plan, and Enterprise Learning Agenda.
- Prepare a program evaluation report that will be added to an inclusive evidence base.
- Present results and recommendations to the SBA's senior leadership.
- Develop an implementation plan in coordination with performance analysts to ensure recommendations are implemented.
- Create a summary fact sheet and publish findings internally and externally, where appropriate.
- Track and monitor the implementation of the recommendations in coordination with performance analysts and the program office.

Disseminate and Implement Findings

After an evaluation is completed, clearance for public dissemination must be secured from the Chief Evaluation Officer and Associate Administrator of each program's respective office. The evaluation team will provide a copy of the report to the Associate Administrator for the respective program, the Chief Evaluation Officer, and the Associate Administrator for Congressional and Legislative Affairs. Actions must also be taken to help the program transform its processes and activities through the evidence gathered.

To ensure that results are actionable and recommendations can be implemented, the following principles are incorporated into each evaluation and considered throughout the process:

- **Equity** — Incorporate principles of systematic justice, impartiality, and fairness. Ensure equity is a key consideration throughout all stages of the evaluation; engage diverse stakeholders and populations most affected by the evaluation; challenge assumptions about the program, participants, evaluation questions, selected methodologies, and results; and consider and mitigate harm that may come from the evaluation.
- **Ethics** — Conduct the evaluation by adhering to the rules governing human rights, confidentiality, and privacy. Minimize the burden to research participants and the cost to taxpayers.
- **Independence** — Conduct the evaluation through an outside party that does not have a vested interest in the outcome and will not interpret the results in ways that are self-serving or misleading. Eliminate the appearance of bias to ensure results are properly used.
- **Rigor** — Employ methodological approaches that best support definitive answers to the evaluation questions under investigation. The limitations of the methods used and the strength of the conclusions should be stated explicitly when describing the methodology and reporting the findings.
- **Relevance** — Scope and select evaluation questions most closely tied to the goals of the program, the priorities of the Agency, and the intended use by senior leaders.
- **Transparency** — To the extent possible under legal, ethical, and security constraints, ensure that

the evaluation scope, design, implementation, and results are available for internal and public review. Provide documentation to enable outside parties to interpret and reproduce the findings.

After opportunities for improvement are identified, a program manager must have the tools to implement recommendations. Performance analysts can help support a program as it modernizes.

Chapter 2: Program Evaluation Framework

The SBA Program Evaluation Framework outlines the structure of the program evaluation function, defines roles and responsibilities, and establishes guiding principles. The Framework is not official policy and is meant to provide SBA program managers with the tools to initiate a program evaluation. The Agency's program evaluation function is housed in the Office of Program Performance, Analysis and Evaluation within the Office of Performance, Planning, and the Chief Financial Officer. SBA program evaluations are managed through lead program evaluators housed in the Analysis and Evaluation Division. These evaluators work in coordination with SBA's performance analysts who support the Agency's strategic planning, decision-support, and performance reporting activities.

Technical Expertise and Management

Program evaluation expertise is cited as one of the most critical elements in the development of capacity. The SBA will assign a program evaluator who is trained and has experience in the following fields: research design and methods, data management and statistical analysis, performance measurement and monitoring, and evaluation communication. The SBA's lead program evaluators are skilled in program evaluation, research methods, and social science.

At the SBA, the responsibilities of a lead program evaluator include leading program evaluations from start to finish; developing and refining the Program Evaluation Framework (guidance), Enterprise Learning Agenda, Evidence Capacity Assessment, and Annual Evaluation Plan; developing logic models, developing training materials, delivering technical advice, and coordinating with other agency program evaluations and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

In coordination with a lead program evaluator, performance analysts, also housed in the Office of Program Performance, Analysis and Evaluation, will provide support through their respective program office accounts. For performance analysts, employee performance standards include critical elements for program evaluation. These standards require that the performance analysts participate in the design and review of the program evaluation proposals and integrate program evaluation findings into their respective program office performance management products.

Some programs may use their own program funds to conduct an evaluation but may require the assistance of a program evaluator. The SBA will ensure accountability and transparency of all program evaluation resources and findings. Moreover, the centralized evaluation team will ensure that evaluation evidence is leveraged for program improvements and that evidence across evaluations is synthesized to establish best practices.

Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice

To instill a culture of evidence-based decision making and ensure program evaluation knowledge transfer, the SBA has established an Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice. The Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice is composed of SBA employees representing program offices and fosters a culture of learning and performance. It creates and sustains an organizational commitment by employees who support program evaluation; continuous improvement; and planning and performance management activities.

The community shares ideas and best practices through monthly meetings and helps foster the Agency's commitment to program improvement. An organization's commitment to a culture of continuous improvement occurs through the planning and development of program evaluations.

Evidence is valuable to improve program outcomes; a community can help ensure that the evaluations commissioned are relevant, practical, and achievable. Regular communication between program staff and senior leadership will be fostered through the community. The members can help promote the use of and disseminate tools for program evaluation.

Senior Leadership Engagement

For evaluations to be successful, senior leaders must be engaged throughout the process. When a program is selected for evaluation, senior leadership must be part of the process and approve the following: logic model; evaluation questions; evaluation design; preliminary results presentation; senior leadership briefings; and the implementation plan.

To support each program evaluation, an executive champion (senior executive) must be appointed by the Associate/Assistant Administrator of that program office to ensure its success. The executive champion will partner with the Chief Evaluation Officer and ensure that other senior leaders are informed about its status. The executive champion will also partner with other senior leaders and present key findings at quarterly performance reviews, while making sure that barriers are removed for program staff to ensure a successful program evaluation.

Contract Solicitation

The SBA allocates funds each year for program evaluation that enables the execution of short-term program evaluations. In addition to having internal expertise, a successful evaluation function must have analytic expertise through internal resources, expert professional evaluators, and external contractors. The SBA uses independent contractors who have experience conducting program evaluations, developing logic models, and summarizing actionable recommendations.

The SBA's evaluation contracts will follow federal rules and regulations. Evaluations are conducted in a systematic manner that follows the sequence of steps outlined in the winning contractor's approved technical proposal. The evaluation contracting vehicle will enable the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) to issue technical direction and task orders based on the unique requirements of each evaluation.

Learning Priorities and Logic Models

As mentioned earlier, the SBA's Enterprise Learning Agenda, programs' learning priorities, and logic models will be used to generate a set of evaluation questions that use quality data, appropriate design, and yield actionable recommendations. As technical assistance can be time intensive and require continuous input from offices undergoing evaluations, the SBA will continue to introduce these tools through the Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice. For each program evaluation team, training on specific items will be offered at varying points of the evaluation cycle.

Evaluation Integration with Performance Management

Within the SBA, the Office of Program Performance, Analysis and Evaluation is responsible for supporting the Administrator's priorities, strategically planning a framework around these priorities with goals and objectives, measuring and assessing progress, using this information to support Agency decisions, and evaluating programs and strategies. These responsibilities, governed by GPRAMA, must complement and inform the program evaluation goals of the Agency. As a result, the SBA's program evaluation function will be integrated into the planning, decision-support, and reporting phases of the performance management cycle. The Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan will integrate program evaluations and other evidence. Evaluations will inform annual strategic objective reviews, quarterly deep dives, and other performance analysis. Findings from these evaluations will be published in performance reports to promote transparency.

During an evaluation, performance analysts will meet at least once with an SBA program evaluator and project liaison to review the current knowledge relevant to a program based on existing evidence and identify unanswered questions that may be pursued with further evaluation studies. Because the program evaluation function is housed in the SBA's Office of Program Performance, Analysis and Evaluation, the Agency can leverage a plethora of data and other evidence. Given this unique opportunity, performance analysts in the Performance Management Division can help identify program activities that could benefit from a program evaluation and help program evaluation teams identify other sources of data.

The program evaluation team will track the evaluation findings through the SBA's Program Evaluation Evidence Registry. This registry stores the results of past program evaluations, research, and other evidence to help ensure future learning and actions transfer to similar programs. Dependent on the results of the evaluation, metrics or milestones may be developed, and revisited monthly or quarterly, to promote transparency and ensure accountability.

Program Evaluation Proposals

The Chief Evaluation Officer will sponsor a call for evaluation proposals each year. Proposals will be gathered each spring in conjunction with the OMB Submission development that begins in June. Program offices will be able to identify potential program evaluations based on their learning needs. Proposals will be collected and reviewed through the Office of Program Performance, Analysis and Evaluation and delivered to the Chief Evaluation Officer and senior leadership for selection. Program evaluation proposals are ranked according to the following base criteria:

- Supports evidence-building for Agency priorities in SBA's Enterprise Learning Agenda.
- Data to conduct the evaluation is available or can reasonably be obtained.
- Use of evaluation results will inform program improvements.

Evaluation Proposal Selection

The SBA program evaluation team will review proposals based on the criteria and deliver recommendations to the Chief Evaluation Officer and the SBA Administrator.

Multi-Stakeholder Evaluation Teams

A prerequisite for a proposal will be the identification of an SBA executive champion and project liaison, who will be responsible for working with an SBA program evaluator to plan and oversee the evaluation. Successful evaluations will require a project liaison to commit four to six hours per week, on average, for eight to 15 months. The project liaison will work with the contractor and the SBA program evaluator, who will also serve as the COR. The program evaluator will advise the evaluation team in planning, designing, and management. The Performance Improvement Officer, Deputy Performance Improvement Officer, executive champion, and project liaison must guarantee active representation of the project liaison and staff on the evaluation team before the evaluation begins.

Training and Technical Assistance

Once the evaluations have been selected and a commitment has been made, an SBA program evaluator will hold customized training sessions upon request with the program evaluation team. The training will include an explanation of key evaluation principles, steps in the process, and how to work most effectively with the contractor and other relevant stakeholders, such as those in field operations, subject matter experts, and program staff who are not directly involved in the evaluation.

Conducting the Evaluation

The evaluation team will be given a template that describes the deliverables, timelines, and elements of the evaluation. This standard procedure will guide the evaluation and will be managed by an SBA program evaluator with advice and collaboration from the program stakeholders. The post-award orientation meeting will include a review of the contractual guidelines and allow the team to clarify roles, expectations, and other issues that have not been explained. This meeting will take place approximately a week after the contractor has received the statement of work and about two weeks before they submit a work plan. See Appendix C for a description of the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in the program evaluation.

Monitoring Ongoing Evaluations

An SBA program evaluator will provide technical advice and assistance on ongoing Agency evaluations and will engage with the programs at least once a month. The evaluator will regularly report on the progress of the Agency's evaluation efforts. The implications of findings will be explored for the evaluated programs during the Quarterly Performance Reviews (Deep Dives) and annual strategic objective review.

Federal Partnerships and Networks

Staying abreast of current directions in the field of evaluation science and in the practice of evaluation requires involvement with partners in the field. The SBA will ensure that it is represented through organizations that promote the use of evidence to improve outcomes in the Federal Government and beyond. The SBA will also be an active participant alongside the OMB Evidence Team[6] and the various federal evaluation communities of

[6] The OMB Evidence Team coordinates program evaluation policy for the Federal Government.

practice. These efforts will ensure that the SBA is represented in the federal community discourse about program evaluation activities. SBA program evaluators will identify continuing education events with which to benchmark progress and achievements with the evaluation function at the SBA each year.

Compliance and Ethics

When implementing the evaluation function, the evaluation team will ensure that it complies with the legal principles of evaluation and social science research methods. Evaluations must adhere to the ethical requirements set forth by the field and monitored by the oversight bodies. Ethical guidelines are adopted across the social science disciplines from which evaluation methods are drawn. As appropriate, evaluators must assure and maintain participant privacy and anonymity. To ensure ethical guidelines are followed, institutions of higher education and many evaluation contractors have Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) that must review and approve all proposed evaluations. IRBs are committees that review research proposals to ensure ethical guidelines are followed in research involving human subjects.

All evaluations that collect new data from non-Federal entities will follow the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA). The PRA ensures that respondents are not overburdened by Federal information collection. The SBA program evaluator will consult with SBA's PRA Officer during the planning phase to comply with PRA requirements.

Securing an Information Collection Request (ICR) approval as part of OMB clearance can take up to 180 days to complete from the point of complete submission of responses to required Supporting Statement Part A and Supporting Statement Part B questions. The evaluation team may explore existing ICRs for data collection. Select data must be made available to the public for further analysis and to satisfy the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Thus, SBA evaluation contracts may require public use datasets to be delivered by contractors at the completion of an evaluation. Public-use datasets must remove confidential business information (CBI) and personally identifiable information (PII).

When opportunities arise to use administrative data to conduct evaluations, memoranda of understanding (MOUs), and agreements with federal partners who will provide statistical data that can be matched with program administrative data, must follow the law; and must be constructed to minimize risk to the Agency and its stakeholders. Similarly, evaluation contracts should contain language referencing the Privacy Act and other relevant FAR clauses pertaining to data security, data storage, and protection of confidential information.

Data Security Issues: Negotiating a System Security Plan

An evaluation must ensure that participant data are protected from unauthorized access or use. Standards must be followed to minimize risk of data misuse. These standards will vary depending on the sensitivity of the data. The Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002 (FISMA) provides protection for federal Information systems against threats. The National Institute of and Standards Technology (NIST) provides guidance and standards for FISMA compliance.

An evaluator shall consider the data security standards they will need to require of the contractor early in the scoping process to ensure they are specified in the contract terms and conditions. To ensure the contractor complies with the standards, the evaluator shall review the contractor's system security plan that details how

the data will be protected.

In the framework, the SBA must be proactive to ensure that compliance to ethics is invariably achieved. Before an evaluation begins, an SBA program evaluator will coordinate with staff in the Office of General Counsel (OGC) on any data collection, sharing, or matching. The SBA will flag all concerns with adherence to these statutes and regulations so that internal controls can be developed to mitigate potential non-compliance. An accounting of these concerns will summarize challenges encountered through the evaluation. Each evaluation team will share any concerns for legal risks in the evaluation with OGC.

Plan and Prepare

Five key considerations influence how you plan for an evaluation:

Choosing the right evaluation approach for your program. The purpose of the evaluation must inform the evaluation approach, which must also align with the program's maturity. Design evaluations, sometimes called formative evaluations, are prospective and used in program development or retooling. Process evaluations are conducted after a program is implemented, and typically serve as a check on how the program is being managed. Outcome and impact evaluations are retrospective, and they focus on program results. Impact evaluations also assess the causal links between program activities and outcomes.

Budgeting for an evaluation. Conducting an evaluation can take considerable time and incur significant expense. Budgets required for evaluations vary widely, depending on the scope and scale of the program, the type and complexity of evaluation questions, the evaluation design, and the availability of existing data. Your COR and agency evaluation practitioners can help you estimate a budget based on your program's unique evaluation goals.

Developing an implementation plan. An evaluation implementation plan includes specific evaluation tasks, the associated deliverables, and a timeline for conducting the evaluation. The plan helps hold the evaluation team accountable and ensures that an evaluation promptly produces the anticipated outputs.

Equitable design and awareness. The practice and results of evaluations can include continuous learning and strategy improvements that lead to policy, social, and system changes. Before engaging in an evaluation, consider its potential effects and impacts. These can include identification of a need, change in a process, or an unanticipated result from a statistical analysis. When considering scenarios, there may be negative or disproportionate effects on particular people or groups. Throughout this evaluation framework are considerations to make when doing evaluations in service of equity, so that a finding to an evaluation question is not singular but contains richness in multiple answers, truths, and perspectives.

During the initial phase of considering an evaluation, it is also worthwhile to challenge notions, assumptions, and biases about the program, policy, or problem you wish to evaluate. Our experiences shape how we frame problems, interpret information, and provide solutions. Therefore, uncovering, acutely understanding, and developing an awareness of our beliefs and perspectives is a critical step in shaping the evaluation.

Anticipating potential data limitations and stakeholder concerns. You should be aware of potential challenges that SBA programs often face related to program evaluation. These include limitations in identifying existing data resources, determining if you need to collect new data, and overcoming barriers to collecting new data. You should identify and address common internal and external stakeholder concerns about outcome evaluations before the evaluation starts. These guidelines provide a detailed discussion of common stakeholder concerns, approaches, and responses to consider. These barriers are typical to all program evaluations, but anticipating them up-front can help you prepare for and overcome them.

Identify Key Stakeholders

A key step in evaluating a program is identifying stakeholders and developing a stakeholder involvement plan. This plan can be as formal or informal as the situation warrants. These guidelines broadly define a stakeholder as any person or group who has an interest in the program being evaluated or in the results of the evaluation. Incorporating a variety of stakeholder perspectives in the planning and implementation stages of your evaluation will provide many benefits, including:

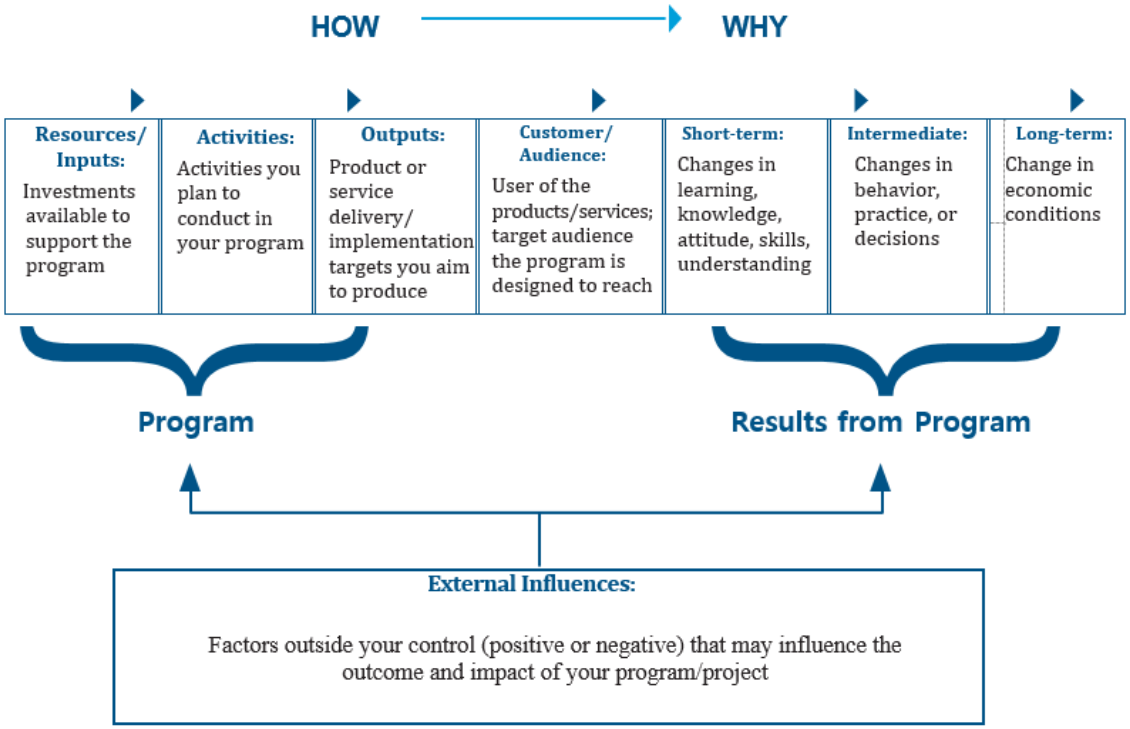
- Fostering a greater commitment to the evaluation process.
- Increasing the chances that findings and recommendations are implemented.

To foster cooperation, first identify relevant stakeholder groups and then determine the appropriate level of involvement for each group (see Appendix C for the key roles in SBA evaluations).

Develop or Update the Learning Priorities and Program Logic Model

Programs considering an evaluation at the SBA must first define their leaning needs. This process involves considering the program's functions, its current goals, priorities, and challenges, and areas where building evidence would help improve program effectiveness and efficiency. Evaluation ideas are prioritized based on their alignment with the SBA's Enterprise Learning Agenda, which ensures that evaluations contribute to the SBA's overall strategic goals and learning needs. Programs can also formalize their learning priorities in a program-level learning agenda.

A logic model is a diagram and text that shows the relationship between your program's work and its desired results. Every program has inputs (or resources), activities, outputs, customers (or audiences), and desired outcomes; a logic model describes the logical (causal) relationships among these program elements, as illustrated in the graphic below. Logic models help programs articulate their theory of change, which outlines how the program's activities lead to the desired results of the program.



The next section will help you form critical questions that, if answered, would improve the functionality or build evidence for the impact of your program.

Develop Evaluation Questions

The following four steps should aid evaluators in the process of designing evaluation questions:

1. Review the SBA's Enterprise Learning Agenda and current program priorities.
2. Review the logic model or theory of change and further identify what aspects of your program you wish to evaluate.
3. Consult with stakeholders and conduct a brief literature search for studies on programs like yours.
4. Generate a potential list of the overall evaluation questions.

Group evaluation questions by themes or categories (e.g., resource questions, process questions, outcome questions). For outcome evaluations, ensure that they will be effective in measuring progress toward program goals and against identified baselines.

Conduct and Monitor

Assessing evaluation data needs is often the first implementation step of the evaluation and will help to inform the selection of evaluation design. You will need to determine the extent to which existing data sets, referred to as ***secondary data***, can address your evaluation questions. As part of this process, your evaluator will review the primary data already collected to determine if they are suitable for evaluation purposes. ***Primary data***

collection refers to any new data necessary to be collected. There are many data collection methods used for program evaluation, and each of these methods has advantages and challenges. Methods include surveys, interviews, focus groups, and direct monitoring or observation.

You will need to decide if the data that you require to address evaluation questions are qualitative, quantitative, or both. ***Qualitative data*** are often in-depth collections of information gathered through observations, focus groups, interviews, document reviews, and photographs. They are non-numerical in nature and are often classified into discrete categories for analysis. In contrast, ***quantitative data*** are usually collected through reports, tests, surveys, and existing databases. They are numerical measures of your program (e.g., the amount of loans administered) that are usually summarized to present general trends that characterize the sample from which these data are drawn. The decision to use qualitative or quantitative data is not an either/or proposition. Instead, consider which form of data is most useful (given the evaluation question and context).

SBA program managers must balance obtaining sufficient high-quality quality data to demonstrate useful results while not overburdening the partners from whom you would solicit the data. Though you and your evaluator must gather high-quality data, the requirements cannot be too onerous for partners. Any approach to primary data collection must consider the "tipping point" where the data collection itself becomes a disincentive to participation in your program.

Select an Evaluation Design

There are three broad classes of evaluation methodologies: non-experimental, quasi-experimental, and true experimental.

Non-experimental designs are best suited to answer design and process questions (e.g., What are the inputs available for this program? Are the activities supporting good customer satisfaction?). Non-experimental designs do not include comparison groups of individuals or groups not participating in the program.

Quasi-experimental designs are employed to answer questions of program outcome. They often compare outcomes of program participants with non-participants that have not been randomly selected. Alternately, a quasi-experiment might measure the results of a program before and after an intervention has taken place to determine if the time-related changes can be linked to the program's interventions. This type of evaluation design can be particularly appropriate for evaluating social programs, such as those most often funded by the SBA, because a true experimental design for these programs is often not feasible, practical, or ethical to implement.

True experimental designs (alternately referred to as randomized control trials, or RCTs) involve the random assignment of potential program participants to either participate in or be excluded from the program. These studies try to assess the causal impact and yield quantitative data that are analyzed for differences in results between groups based on program participation. True experiments can be used in evaluation when:

- Clearly defined interventions can be manipulated and uniformly administered.
- There is no possibility that treatment will spill over to control groups (those for whom a program's intervention is not intended, see textbox).
- It is ethical and feasible to deny a program's services to a group, at least for a long enough time

to support the evaluation.

Implement the Evaluation

After you have settled on your evaluation questions and evaluation design, you are ready to implement the evaluation. At this time, you can generally turn the reigns over to your lead program evaluator. However, a few aspects of implementation may require your involvement. These include:

- Distribute the evaluation design, or a summary of it, to stakeholders, and subsequently communicate any schedule or other important changes to stakeholders during implementation.
- Review and provide feedback on interview guides, surveys, or other data collection instruments, if your evaluator did not finalize these during the evaluation design.
- Make first contact with participants whom evaluators need to contact to inform them about the evaluation and encourage them to participate in data collection.
- Participate in periodic check-ins with your evaluator to ensure implementation is on track and to help address any implementation challenges.
- Assist in the contextual interpretation of analytical results.

Disseminate and Implement Findings

Although communicating your results is one of the final steps in the evaluation process, you should start planning for it early. Although your evaluator will take primary responsibility for collecting and analyzing evaluation data, the process of communicating evaluation results requires collaboration between the evaluator and the SBA program manager. Careful consideration of your program's stakeholders will influence how to best organize and deliver evaluation results. The results have three basic elements: ***findings***, ***conclusions***, and ***recommendations.***

Data collected during the implementation of the project will yield ***findings***. Findings refer to the raw data and summary analyses. Because the findings are a part of the data analysis process, the evaluator should retain the primary responsibility for communicating findings to program management. Evaluators often deliver findings to the SBA program in a draft report or preliminary findings briefing.

Conclusions represent the interpretation of the findings, given the context and specific operations of your SBA program. Your evaluator may independently derive some initial interpretations; however, program managers should have an opportunity to provide comments based on the draft report and/or preliminary findings briefing to suggest ways to refine or contextualize the interpretation of the findings.

Recommendations are based on the findings and conclusions of your evaluation. A strong evaluator will understand that framing recommendations is an iterative process that should involve obtaining feedback from SBA project staff and key stakeholders. Project staff involvement in the development of recommendations is important, as most recommendations are designed to lead to changes in how programs work.

Communicate Evaluation Results

In addition to a report, you can opt for alternative reporting formats depending on the needs of each stakeholder group. Common reporting methods include a shortened version of the evaluation report for broad distribution; briefing(s) that may use slides or other visual aids; and evaluation fact sheet(s). At a minimum, you and your evaluator's communication of evaluation results should include the following steps:

1. Present preliminary results and findings to program staff and other relevant stakeholders (e.g., SBA's senior management).
2. Prepare a program evaluation report.
3. Conduct the final recommendations briefing to the SBA 's senior management.
4. Create a summary fact sheet of the evaluation's key findings and recommendations.
5. Publish findings in consultation with the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs and work with the SBA program evaluation team to disseminate your evaluation findings through the SBA Program Evaluation & Evidence Registry (PEER).

Tying your findings directly to the evaluation questions strengthens the applicability and relevance of your results. Organizing your findings and recommendations in a way that clearly makes this link will ensure that you have collected and are reporting on the key questions that the evaluation was designed to answer.

Implement Recommendations

Implementing evaluation recommendations to your program is one of the greatest sources of value to programs from the evaluation process. Toward the end of an evaluation, the project liaison should coordinate with performance analysts in SBA's Office of Program Performance, Analysis and Evaluation to develop a recommendation implementation plan. This plan should include:

- Recommendations for implementation.
- Anticipated results based on implementing the recommendations.
- Actions planned to implement recommendations.
- Action budget.
- Timeline for completing actions and implementing recommendations.

Your evaluation plan should receive approval and support from relevant senior management. This approval will help ensure that resources are sufficient to implement the recommendations. The implementation plan should also include methods to track and monitor the implementation of recommendations.

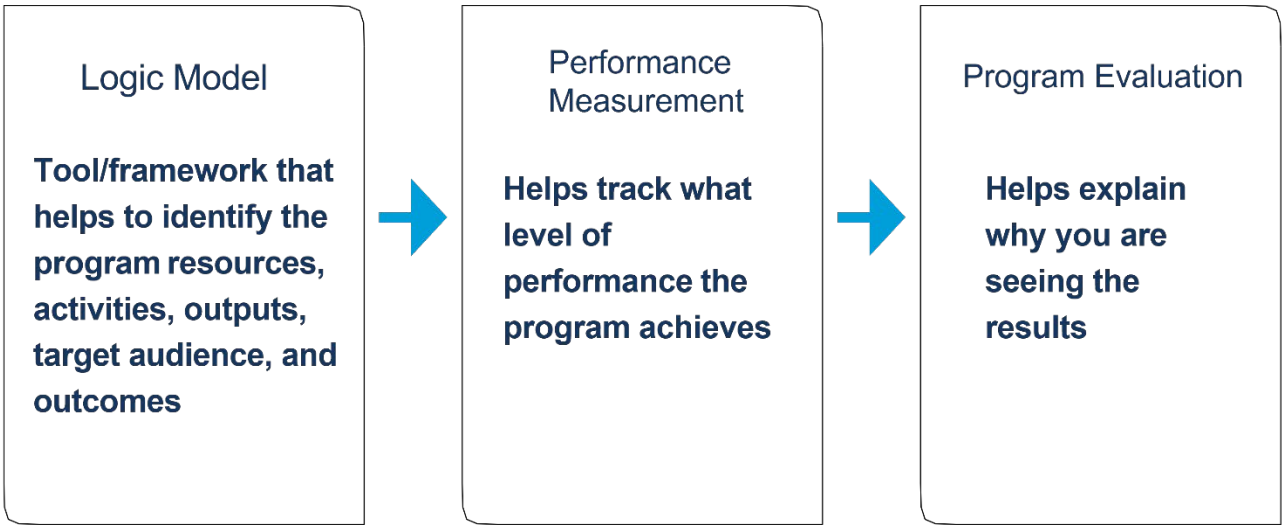
Why Evaluate?

Some individuals may say that program evaluation is too time-consuming, onerous, and costly. However, the history of federal programs suggests that failure to evaluate programs can be costlier in the long term. Although there are costs associated with commissioning independent evaluations, program evaluation can empower leaders to better understand what elements of a program's design work and why. This knowledge can lead to performance improvements that can lead to cost-savings.

Program evaluation provides the opportunity for a more comprehensive review of a program. Results illustrate how SBA programs make a difference for entrepreneurs, are effective and efficient, provide customer satisfaction, offer benefits that outweigh program costs, and merit continued funding. If evaluation results show that a program needs improvements, information developed from the evaluation can help decision-makers determine where adjustments should be made to ensure future success. Reasons for evaluating SBA programs include:

- ***Providing data to stakeholders.*** Program evaluations provide valuable information to program managers, senior leadership, program participants, and other external stakeholders.
- ***Improving the program.*** Program evaluations can help identify when program goals have been met and whether changes need to be made (in activities or allocation of resources) to meet program goals.
- ***Informing policy and funding decisions.*** By helping the SBA understand the role of an individual program in its broader policy toolbox, program evaluations help SBA 's senior leadership allocate resources and set priorities. SBA program managers that can demonstrate a link between program activities and outcomes through objective evaluation are more likely to receive continued support.
- ***Engaging SBA employees.*** By involving SBA employees in the development of evaluation questions, program evaluations create an opportunity for employees to engage more in their program's operations and delivery.

Stakeholders are increasingly interested in ensuring that programs are adequately evaluated to determine whether they are well designed and effective. Program evaluation is essential for learning about programs and improving them. Evaluations can produce data needed to respond to and answer key questions and accountability demands.



Chapter 3: Program Evaluation Role in Performance Management

Logic modeling, performance measurement, and program evaluation work in a dynamic system. The logic model provides a framework that will help you clearly understand and communicate how your program's activities, outputs, and outcomes connect to your long-term goals. Performance measurement involves ongoing monitoring and reporting of the program's progress and accomplishments. Program evaluation builds on these tools as a formal assessment that examines and draws conclusions about the effectiveness of a program's design, implementation, and impacts. The SBA can then apply the results of program evaluations to improve program operations and service delivery.

Performance Measurement Versus Program Evaluation

Imagine you just bought a new car. Both the salesperson and the owner's manual indicate your car should get 30 miles per gallon of gas. Well, it has been six months, and you have kept meticulous records. You notice your car has only managed to get 20 miles per gallon. What do you do? You take the car back to the dealership and ask the mechanic to determine why the car is not meeting the specified performance standard. The mechanic finds a problem with the engine, fixes it, and you drive off with a better functioning car.

The gas mileage records are the performance measurement part of the equation, and the mechanic's diagnosis is the program evaluation. This scenario is an analogy of the differences and relationships between these two tools as applied to SBA programs.

Program evaluation uses data on program performance to assess why results are occurring. Therefore, collecting data on program performance is an important component of program evaluation. Your program may already collect performance data for other purposes (e.g., tracking metrics for annual performance reporting). If your program has not identified or collected performance data, you must include this task as part of your evaluation process. The program logic model, described in Chapter 7.C, will help to identify potential measures. If you have already developed a logic model for your program, you do not need to develop a different one for the evaluation. Instead, you should regularly review your existing logic model and make any necessary updates or revisions.

Who Should Use These Guidelines?

Chapter two, the SBA's evaluation framework, outlined the steps the Agency takes to use evidence to inform policy, strategy, and resource decisions. The accompanying guidelines (chapters four through seven) serve as a companion to the framework by providing technical direction to evaluation teams.

Not everyone at the SBA is, or is expected to be, an expert in program evaluation. Many people are ***evaluation users***; they have limited knowledge of program evaluation but benefit from, see the value of, and might be called on to participate in the evaluation process occasionally. Others are ***lead program evaluators***

who have an in-depth knowledge of program evaluation and advise, manage, or conduct evaluations. Although lead program evaluators are capable of planning and managing an evaluation without external aid, the SBA uses external program evaluators to conduct evaluations to ensure the objectivity and credibility of evaluation studies. These guidelines primarily support evaluation users. As users:

- ***Program managers*** are responsible for determining how their programs should be evaluated, what components of their programs could benefit from an evaluation, and when an evaluation should take place. Although managers need not have the technical expertise to conduct an evaluation, knowledge of the basic steps in the evaluation process will help inform decisions that must be made when commissioning evaluations and using evaluation findings to make management decisions.
- ***Program staff*** are often part of the program evaluation team and, as such, are responsible for participating in the program evaluation. They will benefit from having a basic understanding of the program evaluation concepts and techniques that they may encounter during an evaluation. This background will allow them to be able to "speak the same language" as the seasoned evaluators on their team.

For additional information on evaluation stakeholders, Chapter 7.B includes the complete list of evaluation roles and responsibilities.

How To Use These Guidelines

At its most sophisticated level, program evaluation can be a very complex discipline, with practitioners devoting entire careers to narrow aspects of the field. These guidelines do not assume that you are such an expert, nor do they aim to make you one. They are intended to introduce the novice to the world of program evaluation and walk you through a step-by-step framework for how to design and conduct an evaluation of an individual SBA program. They are designed to enable you to work more effectively with an external program evaluator. We have included actual examples of SBA programs to help illustrate the concepts described.

Guidelines Roadmap

Before starting a program evaluation, you should become familiar with the key steps in the process. These guidelines are organized into the next three chapters that reflect each of these steps. While the framework appears to be linear and sequential, you and your evaluator are likely to revisit one or more of these steps.

- Chapter 4: Plan and Prepare
- Chapter 5: Conduct and Monitor
- Chapter 6: Disseminate and Implement Findings

Chapter 4: Plan and Prepare

4.A. Plan the Evaluation

Four key considerations influence how you plan for an evaluation:

- Choosing the right evaluation
- Budgeting for an evaluation
- Developing an implementation plan
- Anticipating potential data limitations and stakeholder concerns

If evaluation planning is incorporated into the design of a program, evaluation costs can be far lower and the quality of the final evaluation much higher.

Although evaluations can be designed and conducted once a program is in operation, doing so may result in higher costs, fewer options, and decreased capacity to obtain good answers to important program questions.

Choosing the Right Evaluation

Program evaluations help assess effectiveness and lead to recommendations for changes at all stages of a program's development. The type of program evaluation should align with the program's maturity and be driven by your purpose for conducting the evaluation and the questions that you want to answer. There are several types of evaluations, including, but not limited to:[7]

- ***Design evaluation,*** sometimes called formative evaluation, seeks to assess whether the program will operate as planned. It is appropriate to conduct a formative evaluation during a program development process or during a program redesign process. Evaluating a program's design can be very helpful for developing an effective SBA program if 1) program goals are less clearly defined, 2) only a few staff members were charged with developing the program, or 3) uncertainties exist about a program's intended activities. On the other hand, evaluating a program's design might not be necessary if you have a robust, inclusive, and clear program development process.
- ***Process evaluation*** is typically a check to determine if all essential program elements are in place and operating successfully. This type of evaluation is typically conducted after a program is running for a period. Process evaluations can also be used to analyze mature programs under some circumstances, such as when you are considering changing the mechanics of the program, or if you want to assess whether the program is operating as effectively as possible. Evaluating a program's process usually is

[7] References to evaluation types can vary, but the types and definitions discussed here are quite common in the evaluation field.

not necessary in the early stages of an SBA program if 1) early indicators show that the program is being implemented according to plan, and 2) program managers and stakeholders are confident that a program's implementation is on target.

- ***Outcome evaluation*** looks at programs that have been up and running long enough to show results and assesses their success in reaching their stated goals. Program outcomes can be demonstrated by measuring the correlations that exist between program activities and outcomes after you have controlled for all the other plausible explanations that could influence the results you observe. However, correlation does not imply causation. Outcome evaluation can tell you that your program likely contributed to the outcome, but to demonstrate that your program has definitively caused the results you observe you would need to conduct an impact evaluation. Outcome evaluations are appropriate when baseline and post-baseline data sets are available or could be developed. Baseline data are initial information on a program or program components collected before receipt of services or participation activities. Outcome evaluations can also be undertaken if you are interested in determining the role, if any, context plays, or if your program is producing unintended outcomes. For example, you may discover your program is achieving distinctive results in different areas or with different populations. However, outcome evaluations are not appropriate when the program is new.
- ***Impact evaluation*** is a subset of outcome evaluation that focuses on assessing the causal links between program activities and outcomes. This evaluation is achieved by comparing the observed outcomes with an estimate of what would have happened in the absence of the program. While an outcome evaluation can identify if goals have been met, an impact evaluation identifies the reason that the goals have been met and that these results would not have been achieved without the program. This is often referred to as measuring attribution. When attribution cannot be quantified with any degree of certainty (e.g., if counterfactual data do not exist), evaluators are often able to characterize a program's contribution to the outcomes realized through analysis of existing or collected data, and sometimes through triangulation of findings across multiple methods.

  In these cases, evaluators clearly describe the limitations of their analysis, including other factors that could be contributing to the outcomes identified, and why there is any confidence that the program is contributing to the outcomes. Impact evaluations can be conducted at two phases in a program's lifecycle. First, they can be conducted as part of the piloting stage to determine if a programmatic approach should be expanded into a full-scale program. Second, they can be conducted on mature programs to determine whether a program is having the intended behavior change and/or economic result. Causal claims can be made when a program is subjected to a randomized control trial (RCT), where one group receives the program's services and one group does not. Even when an RCT is completed, the samples may not be large enough to be generalizable to the population. Thus, while it is rare to be able to ascertain causality in social science research, quasi-experimental designs may suggest casual relationships, and small-scale non-experimental designs can provide valid and reliable evidence to build the body of evidence needed to inform decision-making. See the methods discussion in Chapter 5 for more information.

Working with a Program Evaluation Contractor

Program evaluation contractors provide important outside perspective and expertise. Evaluation contractors are selected by an expert panel based on the panel's review of a contractor's proposed methods for completing the evaluation, cost, and qualifications as directed by the FAR. Use these tips for working with a program evaluation contractor:

- Work with the contractor to facilitate data collection from internal and external evaluation stakeholders. This step can cut the cost of an evaluation greatly, increase the response rate, and reduce the frustration of program participants.
- Promote the active involvement of the SBA program staff. Doing so will lead to a better report that is more likely to meet the needs of the program with recommendations that are more likely to be implemented.
- Have an explicit and documented agreement with the contractor about steps that will be taken to ensure objectivity (e.g., peer review).
- Be clear about who will make final decisions about how the program and the contractor will share information about the evaluation process, draft evaluation products, and final evaluation reports or briefings.

Four Types of Program Evaluation

Type	When to Use	What it Shows	Why it's Useful
Design Evaluation	During program development	Identifies needs that the program should address (e.g., is the program's approach conceptually sound?)	Informs program design and increases the likelihood of success
Process Evaluation	As needed after the program development stage	How all essential program elements are in place and operating (e.g., how well are the program's activities being implemented?)	Allows program managers to check how program plans are being implemented
Outcome Evaluation	After program has been implemented for a reasonable period	The extent to which a program has demonstrated success in reaching its stated short-term and intermediate outcomes after you have ruled out other plausible rival factors that may have produced program results (e.g., to what extent is the program meeting its short- and intermediate-term goals?)	Provides evidence of program accomplishments and short-term effects of program activities
Impact Evaluation	Both during the pilot stage and with mature programs	Causal relationship between program activities and outcomes (e.g., did the program's activities cause its long-term goals to occur?)	Provides evidence that the program, and not outside factors, has led to the desired effects

SBA Evaluation Proposal Process

SBA's centralized evaluation proposal process follows an annual call for evaluation proposals. This call grows from discussions with individual programs aimed at identifying questions that, if answered, could lead to performance improvements. In addition to engaging with the Office of Program Performance, Analysis and Evaluation throughout the year to discuss evaluation possibilities and to receive technical assistance, programs interested in program evaluation support from the Analysis and Evaluation Division may submit a proposal to the Office of Performance Management and the Chief Financial Officer during the annual solicitation period in spring. The lead program evaluator will convene a team of evaluation and program experts to consider the proposals, and the team will make recommendations to the Chief Evaluation Officer and the Performance Improvement Officer about which proposals to support in that evaluation cycle. The SBA aims to complete evaluations within eight to 15 months. However, evaluations requiring clearance from OMB for primary data collection may take longer (see Chapter 5 or a discussion of the Paperwork Reduction Act and OMB's role in overseeing primary data collections).

Budgeting for an Evaluation

Conducting an evaluation can take considerable time and incur significant expense. Budgets required for evaluations vary widely depending on the scope and scale of the program, the type and complexity of evaluation questions, the evaluation design, and the availability of existing data. The Office of Program Performance, Analysis and Evaluation and other agency evaluation practitioners can help you estimate a budget based on your program's unique evaluation goals.

The size and scale of your SBA program is likely to drive many of your budgeting considerations. For example, large programs with multiple partners might require designs that allow for a comparison of data from unique subgroups involved in the program's efforts. Some programs might be able to take advantage of preexisting administrative data sets, potentially in conjunction with IRS or Census data. Costs of using preexisting data can vary, but sometimes data can be accessed quickly at low or no cost.

Costs for independent contractors (as described earlier in this chapter) typically dominate the cost of the evaluation and should be considered when budgeting for an evaluation. If you need to collect new data or improve the quality of existing data, you should budget additional time and money. The more complicated the data collection and analysis, the more expensive the evaluation will be. A qualitative analysis based on interview or focus group data, for example, can be time-consuming and expensive. A smaller budget will limit the sophistication of any new data collection methods and the statistical analyses. As we point out throughout this document, however, there are several ways you can answer your evaluation questions. These alternate design options may fit within your time and fiscal constraints while still providing information useful for your program.

The SBA allocates funds for evaluation from a centralized evaluation budget and cost sharing from individual programs that reserve funds for evaluation activities. The SBA also uses creative options for implementing evaluation activities, such as through relationships with academic institutions, government agencies, think tanks, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Finally, you should ensure that you have management support to authorize the reallocation of internal resources (i.e., time, funding) to support the evaluation effort.

Implementation Plan

An evaluation implementation plan, also known as a Work Plan, includes specific evaluation tasks, the associated deliverables, and a timeline for conducting the evaluation. The Work Plan helps hold the evaluation team accountable and ensures that an evaluation promptly produces the anticipated outputs.

Anticipating Potential Data Limitations and Concerns

You should be aware of challenges that SBA programs often face related to program evaluation. These include limitations in identifying existing data resources, barriers to collecting new data, and methods to address concerns. These barriers are typical to all program evaluations but anticipating them up-front can help you prepare for and overcome them. In the following sections, we describe these challenges in more detail and provide tips for addressing them.

Identifying Existing Data Sources

Ideally, your program should have been collecting performance data since it began, and those data can be easily used to evaluate the program. The table that follows highlights opportunities to leverage performance management for program evaluation. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, however, you might discover that you do not have the right type of data needed to conduct the evaluation. If this is the case for your program, first look to see if the data you need were already collected by another source, such as studies and reports by other organizations (e.g., GAO, the SBA's Office of Inspector General, etc.). You and your evaluator can also use information from a readily available source such as a public database or company reports. A surprising amount of data are collected on thousands of topics, and the key is often in knowing where to look and remaining persistent. Be aware of how the data are collected, however, and that the organizations collecting the data might define terms differently than you do. These issues can affect data quality and validity (or the extent to which a data collection technique accurately measures what it is supposed to measure), as described in Chapter 2.

Connections Between Performance Management and Program Evaluation

Reporting Product	Purpose	Leveraging Performance Management for Program
Strategic Plan	Serves as the long-term blueprint for accomplishing the Agency's mission and priorities. Developed every four years and connects the SBA's mission with its programs/activities and defines long-term outcomes through strategic goals, objectives, and measures. Sets the framework for annual planning, budgeting, and accountability.	• Work with program offices to identify existing evidence to justify strategies and programs and develop an Enterprise Learning Agenda. • Include performance evaluations in Strategic Plan under program evaluations with an excerpt on how evaluation efforts further the Strategic Plan. • Evaluation team identifies potential evidence to be used by performance liaisons as they discuss accomplishments and challenges. • Identify gaps in evidence to find or build.
Annual Performance Plan/Report (APP/APR)	Serves as the annual plan that justifies strategies, initiatives, programs, and activities that further the Strategic Plan.	• Demonstrate where evidence is used to justify strategies, initiatives, programs, activities, and performance metrics. • Integrate evaluation and evidence. • Performance analysts describe completed, planned or ongoing program evaluations with the APP/APR.
Quarterly Deep Dives	Reviews of quarterly progress on performance and promotes senior management accountability to drive progress.	• Demonstrate evidence that shows progress or justifies strategies. Identify areas for new evaluations. • Programs present on milestones achieved through program evaluation to help inform performance measures.

Reporting Product	Purpose	Leveraging Performance Management for Program Evaluation
Strategic Objective Reviews	Annual assessments of strategic objectives and program portfolios that use performance data and other evidence.	• Demonstrate new or existing evidence that connects inputs, outputs, and outcomes and describes how program evaluation is furthering the strategic objectives and contributions to the program portfolios. • Identify programs for potential evaluations. • Use the Strategic Objective Summary Findings and Portfolio Reviews to inform the Enterprise Learning Agenda by coordinating with performance analysts.
Performance Measures and Data Quality Review	Summarize the quality of existing performance measures in terms of validity, reliability, and utilization.	• Explore the value of adding process, outcome, and customer satisfaction measures. • Review logic models and identify useful measures.

Collecting New Data

In some cases, existing data sources might be inadequate for your evaluation needs or have quality issues that cannot be overcome. In this scenario, you will need to develop new data. To collect new data, research SBA programs (e.g., through the Evidence Registry or the SBA PEER website) that have previously been evaluated to identify examples of the types of data gathered and to determine how these programs handled similar challenges. When you are ready to collect new data, the Paperwork Reduction Act might require you to obtain an Information Collection Request (ICR). Chapter 2 goes into greater depth on navigating the ICR process and the Paper Reduction Act.

Anticipating and Addressing Concerns

Several consumers of your evaluation may have concerns you will need to address proactively throughout the evaluation process.

Internal SBA Concerns. First, you must anticipate the concerns of the primary consumers of your evaluation, those most closely involved in the program, program staff, managers, and SBA senior leadership. Apprehension about program evaluation is not unique to SBA programs. Program evaluation is often associated with external accountability demands. The program staff might feel pressured to show results, yet often feel unprepared for program evaluations. The section that follows presents common concerns and responses to consider.

Evaluation Concerns and Responses to Consider

Target Audience Concerns. The target audience of the program might be apprehensive about evaluation as well. To address any concerns, discuss the goals and purpose of the evaluation with program participants, and emphasize that the objective is to improve program function. Provide clear information to participants on:

- How the evaluation results will be used.
- The level of data transparency (e.g., whether individual participant data will be identified in the evaluation report or if the data will be aggregated across participants in a way that preserves confidentiality).
- How confidential business information such as firm revenues will be treated (if applicable).

In addition, consider these ideas for involving the program's target audience in the evaluation process:

- Involve stakeholders as you develop evaluation questions (discussed later in this chapter).
- Continue to involve a subset of program participants and staff throughout the evaluation to help address concerns and increase the extent and reliability (i.e., the extent to which a measurement instrument yields consistent, stable, and uniform results over repeated observations or measurements under the same conditions) of any new information collected (discussed later in this chapter).
- Consider ways to minimize data collection burdens faced by participants and staff throughout the course of the evaluation by making the best use of existing data and only asking questions that are relevant to evaluation objectives (discussed in Chapter 2).
- Provide participants with timely results and feedback (discussed in Chapter 3).

Public Accountability Concerns. Finally, governmental oversight bodies and key public stakeholders often look to program evaluation as a means of verifying that programs are achieving their intended long-term goals and thus using taxpayer money effectively. Some parties think that impact evaluations, because they are the only type of evaluation design capable of making causal links between programs and their long-term goals, are the only type of evaluations worth conducting.

4.B. Identify Key Stakeholders

Who Should Be Involved in Evaluations of SBA Programs?

A key step to evaluation involves identifying stakeholders through a stakeholder involvement plan. These guidelines broadly define a stakeholder as any person or group who has an interest in the program being evaluated or in the results of the evaluation. Incorporating a variety of stakeholder perspectives in the planning and implementation stages of your evaluation will provide many benefits, including:

- Fostering a greater commitment to the evaluation process.
- Gaining better program understanding.
- Incorporating diverse perspectives.
- Gaining valuable insights for designing the evaluation, interpreting the results, and creating appropriate recommendations.
- Increasing the chances that findings and recommendations based on evaluation results are implemented.

To foster the desired level of cooperation, you should first identify relevant stakeholder groups and then determine the appropriate level of involvement for each group. The remainder of this chapter discusses these steps in more detail.

Identifying Relevant Stakeholders

Identify and engage the following principal groups of internal and external stakeholders:

- ***People or organizations involved in program operations*** are entities designing and implementing the program and collecting performance information. These entities could also include field operations staff, sponsors, collaborators, coalition partners, funding officials, and program managers. This group plays an important role in providing the "boots on the ground" perspective.
- ***People or organizations served or affected by the program*** might include the program's target audience, academic institutions, elected and appointed officials, advocacy groups, and community residents.
- ***Primary intended users of the evaluation results*** are the individuals able to decide and act

with evaluation results. They include program managers and senior leadership. This group should not be confused with primary intended users of the program itself, although some overlap can occur.

- ***Secondary intended users of the evaluation results*** are also individuals able to decide and act with evaluation results but for an office or program in the SBA that is not the focus of the evaluation. The SBA's use of enterprise learning agendas (discussed in Chapter 7.D) emphasizes opportunities to apply lessons learned from an evaluation across the Agency. Potential secondary users may be identified from programs that conduct similar activities or programs that contribute to the same strategic goal and/or objective area outlined in the Strategic Plan.
- ***Agency planners*** are people, such as key regional and program office liaisons, who support all aspects of planning and accountability.

After determining who has been invited to participate in the evaluation, consider who may be left out of the evaluation as currently planned and how to be more inclusive. It is valuable to include diverse stakeholders for the benefit of multiple mental models, or ways of understanding the world, in identifying problems, solutions, and areas and assumptions unknown or unseen by evaluators and program staff. Will engagement of others lead to different results? Can there be multiple answers and truths? Are the people that are likely to be impacted most by this evaluation included? What do they think about the evaluation? What are the power dynamics? Consider if the evaluation work will also include identification and inclusion of community leaders or capacity building.

Role of Stakeholders

Overall, the SBA favors evaluations where program stakeholders play a role. Involving principal stakeholders in the evaluation from the beginning is important for fostering their commitment to the evaluation design, and ultimately the evaluation findings and recommendations. To involve stakeholders, use face-to-face meetings, conference calls, and/or electronic communications. Choose a method or combination of methods that works best for the people in the group.

Continued feedback from stakeholders throughout the evaluation process will help to ensure that the evaluation remains on track to produce useful results. The scope and level of stakeholder involvement will vary for each program evaluation and stakeholder group, however, and keeping the size of the group manageable is important. Stakeholder involvement in program evaluation is often iterative. First, your lead program evaluator should work closely with you on managing stakeholder involvement throughout the program evaluation process.

Secondly, the level of stakeholder involvement may also be based on the need for external objectivity in the evaluation. For evaluations where impartiality is paramount, program staff would have less involvement in evaluation design and implementation. Objectivity might have greater importance in a variety of situations that are not necessarily unique to programs, such as accountability demands from Congress, GAO, or OMB. Furthermore, involvement from program stakeholders may be an especially useful way to alleviate fears when trust is an issue and is useful for programs that find themselves in a defensive posture due to repeated criticism and heightened scrutiny.

Planning the Evaluation with Stakeholders

Before designing the evaluation, ensure that all participating stakeholders understand the purpose of the evaluation and the process: have a conversation with all parties, explaining obligations and expectations of each party (including informal and implicit expectations). Any conflicts of interest should be addressed openly at this stage, so as not to compromise the reliability and credibility of the evaluation process and results. When designing the evaluation, involving as many stakeholders in the initial discussions as possible is good practice. Continue to consult and negotiate with stakeholders; solicit their reactions to the program logic model (Chapter 7.C) and evaluation questions (Chapter 7.D). Consult and negotiate with stakeholders to establish an agreement on key data (e.g., including how to select measures, how to measure program impacts, how to set a baseline and use baseline data, and how to ensure data quality throughout the evaluation process).

From the wider group of stakeholders, select a manageable subset of stakeholder representatives to join the core evaluation team to help make ongoing decisions about the evaluation. Continued use of this team throughout the evaluation process will help keep the evaluation focused, alleviate concerns, and increase the quantity and quality of information collected. See Appendix C for roles and responsibilities of the program evaluation team.

Incorporating a Variety of Perspectives

In addition to the principal groups of stakeholders, consider inviting someone to play the role of "devil's advocate." A skeptic, or someone in the core evaluation team who will challenge assumptions, can strengthen an evaluation's credibility by ensuring that all decisions and assumptions are thoroughly examined. Try to identify a program staff person or other individual with knowledge of the program who will ask tough, critical questions about the program and evaluation process, or someone on the evaluation team can play this role.

Above all, remember that the goal of the evaluation is to produce findings that can be used to improve the program. Common sense dictates that an evaluation process including the individuals involved in the program will produce findings that are relevant and useful. Therefore, you should plan, conduct, and report the evaluation in a way that incorporates stakeholders' views and encourages their feedback, thereby increasing the likelihood that key stakeholders will act upon findings.

Participatory Evaluation

Consider implementing a full participatory evaluation, which involves stakeholders in all aspects of the evaluation, including design, data collection, and analysis. A participatory evaluation will help you and your evaluator to:

- Select appropriate evaluation methodologies.
- Develop evaluation questions that are grounded in the perceptions and experiences of clients.
- Overcome resistance to evaluation by participants and staff.
- Foster a greater understanding of the evaluation among stakeholders.

A participatory evaluation is resource-intensive and may not always be fully realizable. You and your evaluator might choose instead to elicit broad stakeholder input only at key points, consider this input carefully, and be transparent in decision-making. Key points include developing or reviewing the program logic model, formulating evaluation questions, developing the evaluation methodology, reviewing the draft evaluation report, and disseminating findings.

Disseminating and Implementing Findings

Report findings are considered complete and suitable for public dissemination when they receive approval by the respective program office Associate Administrator, the Chief Evaluation Officer, and the Performance Improvement Officer. The distribution of the final report with outside parties is prohibited until official clearance is obtained from the Associate Administrator of the respective program office involved in the evaluation and the Performance Improvement Officer. Once these clearances are obtained, the SBA will provide a copy to the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs and post the report on its website. At this stage, the findings and recommendations should be communicated to the stakeholders identified during the evaluation planning stages.

SBA evaluation should include a recommendations implementation plan to ensure recommendations are acted upon. At this stage, the evaluation's executive champion is essential for providing the support to follow through on evaluation recommendations.

Identifying Key Stakeholders: Women's Business Centers

Women's Business Centers (WBC) provide a variety of services uniquely tailored to meet the needs of communities they serve to help entrepreneurs explore and achieve economic independence through business ownership. Over 100 non-profit centers provide free business advice and no- or low-cost training to established businesses in almost every state and U.S. territory. The SBA engaged stakeholders to identify the best method to evaluate program outcomes. Through meetings with SBA program staff, SBA leadership, WBC staff, and the national Association of Women's Business Centers, the SBA designed an evaluation that addressed stakeholders' concerns and provided meaningful outcome data. After completing the evaluation, the SBA held meetings with these stakeholder groups to discuss findings and recommendations and to foster a collaborative environment.

4.C. Develop or Update the Learning Priorities and Program Logic Model

What Is a Learning Agenda and Why Is it Important?

A learning agenda creates a structure for a program to consider its evaluation priorities or learning priorities. This tool guides program staff through multiple steps to identify program-related information or data gaps, approaches for filling these data gaps, and how the findings can be used to improve the program.

Steps include:

1. Identifying relevant stakeholders.
2. Stating the program's goals and objectives.
3. Formulating guiding questions that, if answered, would improve the program or build evidence of the program's impact. These questions may be based on the program's challenges and should encompass both short-term and long-term program outcomes.
4. Prioritizing the guiding questions.
5. Developing a plan for answering the guiding questions.
6. Implementing the plan.
7. Evaluating the findings.

Learning agendas are designed to improve program implementation by using existing evidence about program performance, generating new knowledge about the program, and fostering innovation. Overall, learning agendas help support a culture of learning and facilitate rapid iterative program corrections from staff and partners at the SBA.

Learning agendas can be created at the program level, the office level, or at an enterprise level as an enterprise learning agenda. An enterprise learning agenda focuses evaluation activities by prioritizing evaluation questions that will have the greatest usefulness across the SBA. For example, the Office of Veterans Business Development may have counseling-related questions about technical assistance that could inform the Office of Entrepreneurial Development's program implementation. This approach will produce an enterprise learning agenda that will focus the Agency's evaluation efforts, in alignment with the strategic plan and other performance management activities.

Using the Learning Agenda in the Evaluation Process

Programs can complete and use learning agendas to facilitate self-examination and self-improvement processes independently of a formal evaluation. In conjunction with a logic model, this serves as a tool to help generate a set of evaluation questions and identify potential data sources.

Why Is a Logic Model Important for Program Evaluation?

A logic model is a diagram and text that shows the relationship between your program's work and its desired results. Every program has inputs (or resources), activities, outputs, customers (or audiences), and desired outcomes; a logic model describes the logical (causal) relationships among these program elements.

Understanding your program clearly is essential for conducting a quality evaluation, as it helps to ensure that you are measuring the right indicators and asking the right questions. Whether reviewing an existing logic model or creating a new one, accurately characterizing the program through logic modeling is important because it ensures that program managers, contractors, and other stakeholders involved in designing the evaluation fully understand the program.

These guidelines provide a simple approach to logic modeling, but more complex logic model approaches could be used (e.g., theory of change diagrams). The logic model terms and definitions described here provide a basic framework that can be used across the variety of logic model approaches. The SBA has worked to develop logic models for many of its programs and continues to develop logic models as a standard part of its evaluation process.

Taking a Step Back To Consider Effects

Within logic models and learning agendas are salient aims for changes. When identifying changes at the individual, community, organization, and system level, consider their effects on particular people or groups. For organizational and system-level changes, are potential changes driving towards greater equity, or are there components that could potentially be inequitable? When answering this question, consider histories and contexts (social, cultural, economic, and political) to define "greater equity." For example, does any change limit access to resources and opportunities? For whom? Consider that systems-level outcomes can have ripple effects in multiple offices, programs, and organizations that can influence the connections and relationships within and between them. In developing and updating logic models and learning agendas, we can maximize the evaluation by using it as a capacity-building activity or incorporating other capacity building activities. Identify and name technical assistance and training opportunities that can align with or be a part of the evaluation.

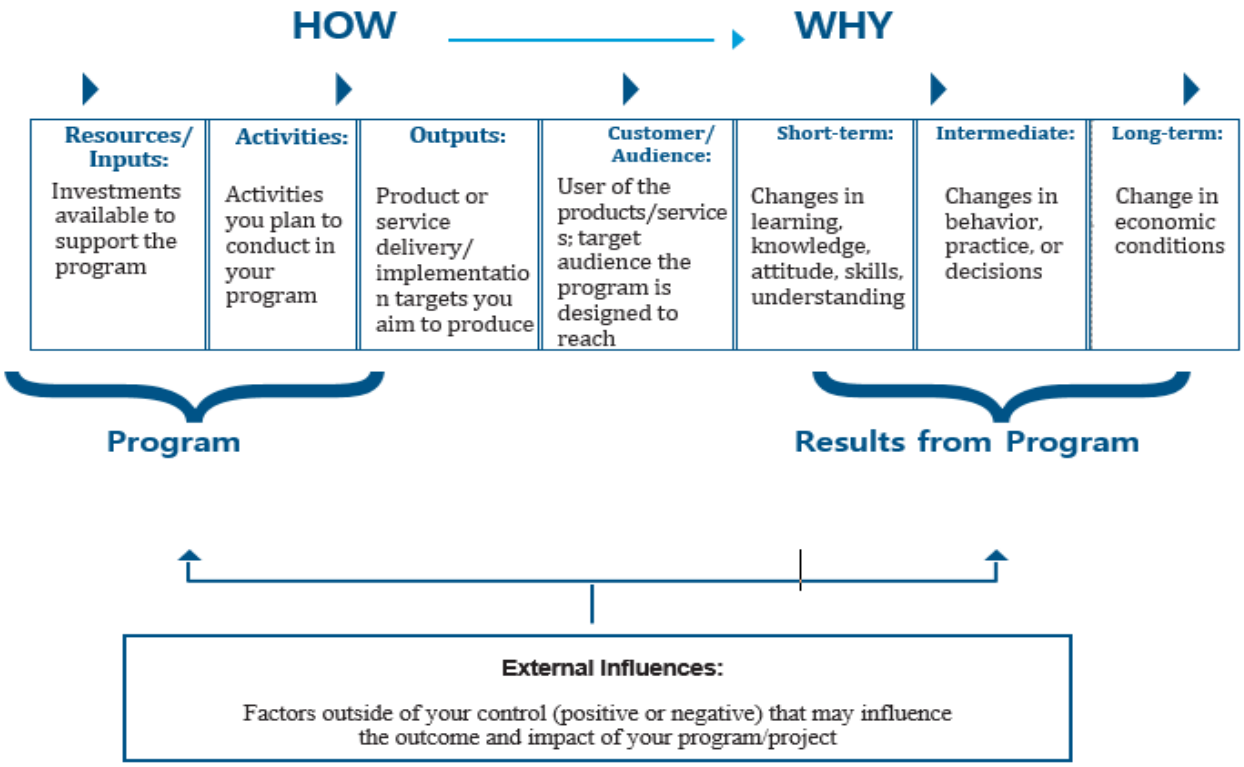
Logic Model Elements

A logic model has seven basic program elements:

1. **Inputs/Resources** – What you need to run your program (e.g., people and dollars).
2. **Activities** – What your program does.
3. **Outputs** – The products/services your program produces or delivers.

4. **Customers/Audiences** – Those groups whose behavior your program aims to affect.
5. **Short-Term Outcomes** – Changes in the decision-maker's knowledge, attitude, or skills.
6. **Intermediate-Term Outcomes** – Changes in the decision-maker's behavior, practices, or decisions.
7. **Long-Term Outcomes** – Changes in the economy because of your program.

Also included in logic models are external influences (i.e., factors beyond your control), such as state programs that mandate or encourage the same behavioral changes as your program and other circumstances (positive or negative) that can affect how the program operates. Logic models also often include assumptions about how your program operates. The diagram below shows a high-level logic model that may be a useful starting point for developing your own. Boxes and arrows represent the logical connection between the separate program elements. SBA program evaluation training includes additional information to help you through the process of developing a logic model for your program.



4.D. Develop Evaluation Questions

Evaluation questions are the broad questions that the evaluation is designed to answer. They are often inspired by or build on existing performance measures, but they differ from performance measures in several ways.

Performance measures are used to gather data on your program's day-to-day activities and outputs. In contrast, evaluation questions delve more deeply into the reasons behind program accomplishments and seek to answer whether current operations are sufficient to achieve long-term goals. Good evaluation questions are important because they articulate the issues and concerns of stakeholders, examine how the program is expected to work and its intended outcomes, and frame the scope of the evaluation.

While interview, focus group, or survey questions are specific data collection tools that are used to gather information from participants that will be used to address the larger evaluation, evaluation questions specify the overall questions the study seeks to answer.

The logic model, the program's learning priorities, and the Enterprise Learning Agenda are excellent places to start the process of determining what questions to answer in your evaluation. Learning agendas prompt you to consider high-level critical questions that, if answered, would improve the functionality or build evidence for the impact of your program. The logic model can further clarify those questions by tying them to the program activities, outputs, and overall logic. For example, during pre-scoping activities for an evaluation of the HUBZone program, staff identified a need to understand the factors that prevent the HUBZone program from meeting its goal.

A logic model can help identify the specific program components that may warrant additional examination based on this question. In the case of the HUBZone program, a logic model illustrated that small businesses are made aware of federal contracting opportunities through matchmaking events. This step occurs before federal contract dollars are awarded. A subsequent evaluation question may focus on examining the effectiveness of those matchmaking events.

Typical SBA program evaluations use three to eight evaluation questions. By working with the Enterprise Learning Agenda, program priorities, program logic model or theory of change, and engaging relevant stakeholders, you and your evaluator can develop the key evaluation questions. The following five steps should aid evaluators in the process of designing evaluation questions:

1. Review, update, or develop the learning priorities. As discussed in Chapter 4.C, this encompasses a review of the purpose and goals of the program, identification of the most important challenges currently facing the program, and development of critical questions that, if answered, would improve the functionality or build evidence for the impact of your program.

2. Review the logic model or theory of change and further identify what aspects of your program to evaluate.
3. Consult with stakeholders and conduct a brief literature search for studies on programs like yours. When reading and reviewing literature to frame evaluation questions, choose information and evidence to review with careful attention to how preferences for certain types of information may influence the framing of the evaluation questions and choices about the methodology. Professional preferences and personal judgments are biases. Gaining awareness of our biases in our work aids us in developing evaluation questions that will provide more complete answers from which to make recommendations and decisions.
4. Generate a potential list of the overall evaluation questions. When framing of evaluation questions focus on systems-level problems and outcomes and avoid presenting the situation in a way that highlights individual or community deficiencies.
5. Group questions by themes or categories (e.g., resource questions, process questions, outcome questions).

When you review the evaluation questions, ensure that they will be effective in measuring progress toward program goals and against identified baselines. When finalizing evaluation questions consider the following:

- Are the questions framed so that the answers are measurable in a high-quality and feasible way?
- Are the questions relevant, important, and useful for informing program management or policy decisions?
- Are the primary questions of all the key stakeholders represented?
- Are any preconceived notions, misconceptions or judgments made within the evaluation questions? If so, are they supported by systems-level evidence?

Defining evaluation questions carefully at the beginning of an evaluation is important, as they will drive the evaluation design, measurement selection, information collection, and reporting.

Chapter 5: Conduct and Monitor

Once you have finalized your logic model/theory of change and evaluation questions, consider the following issues to help choose the right design:

- What is the overarching question your program needs to answer?
- Where is your SBA program in its life cycle?
- What do you hope to show with the results obtained?
- What additional technical evaluation expertise will you need to carry out the evaluation as designed?

The issues above overlap with those raised in Chapter 4.A because the program evaluation process is typically somewhat iterative as it proceeds through the planning and design steps. At this stage, determine if a design, process, outcome, or impact evaluation is best, given the considerations you discovered in the planning phase (each described in detail in Chapter 4.A).

The Foundations of Program Evaluation Design

When your program communicates with key stakeholders about the implementation and results of a program evaluation, you and your evaluator will likely be asked questions related to the rigor and appropriateness of the program evaluation design. Have thoughtful responses to these types of questions:

- ***Design:*** Is the evaluation design appropriate to answer the evaluation question(s)? Is a process evaluation design most desirable? Are outcome and impact evaluation designs more appropriate?
- ***Validity*****:** Are the data you are collecting to represent performance elements measuring what they are supposed to measure? Are the data valid?
- ***Reliability*****:** Is your measurement of the resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes repeatable and likely to yield the same results if undertaken by another evaluator? Are the data reliable? How do you know?
- ***Feasibility*****:** Do you have the money, staff time, and stakeholder buy-in that you need to answer your program evaluation question(s)? Is the evaluation design feasible?
- ***Functionality*****:** Can the information collected through your evaluation be acted upon by program staff? Is the evaluation design functional?

Core Principles

To ensure that results of evaluations are actionable and that recommendations can effectively be implemented, the following principles are incorporated into each evaluation and considered throughout the entire evaluation process:

- ***Equity*** — Incorporate principles of systematic justice, impartiality, and fairness. Ensure equity is a key consideration throughout all stages of the evaluation; engage diverse stakeholders and populations most affected by the evaluation; challenge assumptions about the program, participants, evaluation questions, selected methodologies, and results; consider and mitigate harm that may come from the evaluation.
- ***Ethics*** – Conduct the evaluation by adhering to the rules governing human rights, confidentiality, and privacy. Minimize the burden to research participants and cost to taxpayers.
- ***Independence*** – Conduct the evaluation through an outside party that does not have vested interest in the outcome and will not interpret the results in ways that are self-serving or misleading. Eliminate the appearance of bias to ensure results are properly used.
- ***Rigor*** – Employ the methodological approaches that best support the definitive answers to the evaluation questions under investigation. The limitations of the methods used and how much the conclusions drawn can be unequivocally supported should be stated explicitly when describing the methodology and reporting the findings.
- ***Relevance*** – Scope and select evaluation questions most closely tied to the goals of the program, the priorities of the Agency, and the intended use by senior management.
- ***Transparency*** – To the extent possible under legal, ethical, and security constraints, ensure that the evaluation scope, design, implementation, and results are documented and available for internal and public review. Provide documentation that enables outside parties to interpret and reproduce the findings.

Clarifying how the program evaluation design handles validity, reliability, feasibility, and functionality will help you and your evaluator prepare for the scrutiny of external reviewers and yield results that will more accurately reflect your program's performance. This will ultimately lead to high-quality recommendations on which your program can act.

To ensure that the program evaluation design addresses validity, reliability, and feasibility, the program evaluator will consult the relevant technical and program evaluation literature. A technical literature review involves consulting published information on how the SBA program operates. Additionally, a review of relevant program evaluation literature will focus on past program evaluations of programs with similarities to your program. This can be helpful to identify evaluation strategies and pitfalls of previous evaluations, and it can help to identify existing data that may be useful for your evaluation. The documentation of this review can be as simple as a bibliography in the report. Regardless of its length, the literature review should be made available to internal and external stakeholders to increase the transparency of the program evaluation process and assist in validating your program evaluation's findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Much of the discussion surrounding the quality of a program evaluation involves the concept of rigor. Because well-designed outcome and impact evaluations are better able to determine a direct causal link between a program's activities and a program's results than other evaluation types, these evaluations are frequently associated with greater design rigor. Despite this perception, an impact evaluation design is not necessarily more rigorous than a process evaluation design. The rigor of a program evaluation is not determined solely by the type of evaluation that you undertake but instead by the overall evaluation design and implementation (for more about implementation, please see Chapter 5.B).

The design phase of a program evaluation is a highly iterative process; while this chapter gives a linear description of the design phase, you and your evaluator are likely to revisit various issues several times. Decisions about data needs, how those data can be collected, and the feasibility of the evaluation methodology will all inform the overall design. Your approach to engaging stakeholders (e.g., the members of your core evaluation team and other interested parties) will influence how iterative this phase becomes.

Assessing the Data Needs for the Evaluation Design

Consider the several classes of data needs when planning your evaluation design.

Type of claims your program is expected to address: attribution or contribution. Attribution involves making claims about the causal links between program activities and outcomes, achieved by comparing the observed outcomes with an estimate of what would have happened in the absence of the program. Because the program itself is often only one of a variety of factors that influence small business decision-making, SBA programs often have a difficult time demonstrating attribution.

Contribution, in contrast to attribution, involves measuring the correlations that exist between program activities and outcomes after you have controlled for all the other plausible explanations that might influence the results you observe. Contribution can tell you that your program likely influenced the outcome but cannot confidently demonstrate that your program alone has caused the results observed.

Demonstrating attribution should not be thought of as inherently better than demonstrating contribution; instead, it is simply a matter of what is needed by the program or what data are available. To support attribution claims, your evaluation will generally need to collect more data, including quantitative data from a comparison or control group, to be statistically analyzed in comparison to data for program participants.

The use of original primary data or existing secondary data. Primary data are collected by your SBA program, whereas secondary data are gathered from existing sources that have been collected by others for reasons independent of your evaluation. The assessment of your data needs should follow three broad steps:

- Review the primary data that your program already collects for existing performance reporting to determine if it can be used to address your evaluation questions.
- Search for sources of secondary data that others are collecting and that will appropriately serve your evaluation needs.
- If needed, plan a primary data collection effort specifically for the evaluation.

The form of data you require: qualitative or quantitative data. Data form will shape what types of

analyses are possible, including the types of conclusions you can make. ***Qualitative data*** are often in-depth collections of information gathered through observations, focus groups, interviews, document reviews, and photographs. They are non-numerical in nature and are often classified into discrete categories for analysis. In contrast, ***quantitative data*** are usually collected through reports, tests, surveys, and existing databases. They are numerical measures of your program (e.g., the amount of loans administered) that are usually summarized to present general trends that characterize the sample from which these data are drawn. The decision to use qualitative or quantitative data is not an either/or proposition. Instead, consider which form of data is most useful (given the evaluation question and context). In many cases, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data in the same evaluation will present the most complete picture of your program.

Measures

When assessing your data needs, consider existing data sources already collected. For example, within the SBA, the Office of Program Performance, Analysis and Evaluation is responsible for supporting the Administrator's priorities in part by measuring and assessing progress of SBA programs. These responsibilities complement and inform the program evaluation goals of the Agency. In other words, all program evaluations are integrated into the planning, decision-support, and reporting phases of the performance management cycle. The SBA evaluation team works regularly to integrate reporting and management improvement as unique functions of its performance measurement responsibilities. During the planning phase of your evaluation, meet with performance analysts to discuss historical evidence and performance measures that may inform and support your evaluation (see discussion in the Chapter 2).

Data Collection Methods

Planning can reduce the costs of conducting a program evaluation and increase the quality. If your program collected data early in its history, you are more likely to have access to baseline data and appropriate performance data. Your evaluator should assess your program's existing performance data by asking you the following questions:

- Are the data complete and of high quality? Are data missing due to inconsistent recordkeeping, systematic omissions in data, or other irregularities?
- Are the measurement tools a valid assessment of the program elements you are investigating with your evaluation questions?
- Are the data collection techniques reliable enough to render the same results if they were independently collected by someone else? Is the data collected according to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)?
- Are the data gathered in a way to answer any of the evaluation questions (e.g., are comparable data available from program non-participants)?

The table that follows describes some data collection methods used for program evaluation and the relative advantages and challenges associated with each. Weigh the benefits and costs of each before selecting a data collection method. Using these methods to collect data can be more complex than it appears at first glance. Poorly collected data can undermine your evaluation's usefulness and credibility.

Method	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Key Challenges	Form of Data
Monitoring Performance Measures	Measure program outcomes to assess the degree of Changes.	Can provide evidence of program impact and yield information useful for accountability, and may show whether the program is accomplishing its goal.	Might reveal changes in indicators only over periods of years; might not be sensitive.	Quantitative
Interviews	To understand someone's impressions or experiences.	Provides a full range and depth of information, allows for development of relationship with respondent, and can be flexible.	Are time-consuming/costly and can produce inaccurate results if respondent's recall is inaccurate, if the respondent is influenced by the interviewer's presence (e.g., providing socially desirable answers), or if question wording biases responses. May not be representative of a larger population.	Qualitative
Focus Groups	To explore a topic in depth through group discussion.	Quickly and reliably captures common impressions, can be an efficient way to gain greater range and depth of information in a short time, and can convey key information about programs.	Can be difficult to analyze and can involve a group dynamic that may affect responses.	Qualitative/ Quantitative
Direct Observation of Behavior and Program Processes	To gather information about how a program operates.	Allows events to be witnessed in real-time and observed within a context and provides possible insight into personal behavior and motives.	Can be difficult to reliably code and interpret what you observe, and when observers are present, can influence behaviors of participants.	Qualitative/ Quantitative
Surveys, Checklists	To collect answers to pre-determined questions from many respondents, often for statistical analysis.	Can be completed anonymously, are inexpensive to administer to many people, are easy to compare and analyze, can produce a lot of data, and most conducive to producing results that can be extrapolated to wider population.	Can bias responses, depending on wording; might not provide full story and might not be representative due to volunteer bias and social desirability motivations of respondent.	Quantitative
Document Reviews	To provide an impression of program operations through existing program documentation.	Gather historical information, does not interrupt program or client's routine in program, and collects information that already exists.	Might be incomplete if access to some documents is restricted, and results may not be comparable to your program.	Qualitative/ Quantitative

Method	Overall Purpose	Advantages	Key Challenges	Form of Data
Case Studies	To provide a comprehensive review of one or two elements or an entire program.	Can provide full depiction of program operation and can be a powerful means to portray the program.	Are usually time- consuming and focus on one or two elements fundamental to program and provide a deep, but not broad, view.	Qualitative/ Quantitative

Primary Data Collection Challenges

The following challenges for collecting primary data for program evaluation may be present.

Data Needs Versus Data Collection Techniques. SBA program managers must balance obtaining data of sufficient quality to demonstrate useful results while not overburdening the partners. Any approach to primary data collection must consider the "tipping point" where the data collection itself becomes a disincentive to participation in the program. Additionally, obtaining data from non-participants is often difficult, which creates a major barrier to the design of control groups. Your evaluator can help you brainstorm possible sources for data on non-participants and evaluation designs without control groups.

Information Collection Requests. Another noteworthy data collection barrier is the Information Collection Request (ICR). According to the Paperwork Reduction Act, ICRs must be granted by OMB before a federal agency collects the same or similar information from 10 or more non-federal parties. ICRs describe the information to be collected, give the reason why the information is needed, and estimate the time and cost to the public to answer the request. If you and your evaluator need to collect primary data from outside the Federal Government, begin this process early in evaluation planning. OMB provides guidance in navigating the ICR process on its website. Before embarking on the ICR process, consider strategies for collecting new data that do not require obtaining an ICR:

- Identify third-party organizations that might be interested in collecting some of the data that you need for their own purposes and make it available to the SBA.

  IMPORTANT: SBA program managers cannot request third parties to collect data to support an SBA evaluation without OMB approval through the ICR process; a third party must have an interest beyond the SBA evaluation for collecting the data.

- Evaluate the possibility of collaborating with a related evaluation effort on data collection; especially other programs that have already received an ICR or plan to file an ICR.
- Explore the availability of existing SBA ICRs[8] that might apply to your evaluation questions and have been ICR-approved for evaluation purposes.
- Consider collecting data from federal sources. An ICR is not required if you survey federal employees as part of their occupation.
- Consider all the government agencies, academic institutions, other research organizations, professional associations, trade associations, and other groups that might share data they have collected.

[8] The SBA's existing ICRs can be found at https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAMain.

- Consider teaming with another SBA program that needs to collect data from similar enterprises or sources that might be willing to share resources.

Tips When Filing Your Own ICR

- Start the process early.
- Identify examples of similar programs that have received similar data collection clearance and provide the examples to OMB.
- Look for examples of similar ICRs that are successful and/or pending and use them as potential models for your ICR. RegInfo.gov contains information on ICR packages.
- Build future evaluation considerations into any program ICRs filed to avoid the need to file more than one. For example, new SBA programs can file an ICR early to cover planned performance measurement and future evaluation needs.

For more information or assistance with the ICR process, see OMB guidance on navigating the ICR process on their websites.

5.A. Select an Evaluation Design

When an SBA program communicates its results of a program evaluation, an important question will be asked: "What is your program evaluation methodology?" As a program manager, you do not need to know the technical aspects of design methodology. However, you should be able to identify the defining characteristics and strengths and limitations of each of three broad classes of evaluation methodologies: non-experimental, quasi-experimental, and true experimental.

Non-experimental designs are generally best suited to answering design and process questions (e.g., What are the inputs available for this program? Are the activities leading to customer satisfaction?). Non-experimental designs do not include comparison groups of individuals or groups not participating in the program. In fact, many of these designs involve no inherent comparison groups. Non-experimental designs involve measuring various elements of a logic model and describing these elements, rather than definitively linking them to other elements in the logic model through causality. These designs can yield qualitative or quantitative data and are relatively common in evaluations.

Non-Experimental Design

The SBA HUBZone program supports economic development in Historically Underutilized Business Zones (HUBZones)." The program provides HUBZone businesses access to federal procurement opportunities and is currently being evaluated to, in part, identify barriers to achieving federal contracting goals. This evaluation has helped to determine ways to strengthen and increase the effectiveness of the program's outreach strategies.

Quasi-experimental designs are usually employed to answer questions of program outcome; they often compare outcomes of program participants with non-participants that have not been randomly selected. Alternately, a quasi-experiment might measure the results of a program before and after an intervention has occurred to determine if the time-related changes can be linked to the program's interventions. This type of evaluation design can be particularly appropriate for evaluating social programs, such as those most often funded by the SBA, because a true experimental design is often not feasible, practical, or ethical to implement. Achieving the perfect equivalence between the groups being compared is often difficult because of uncontrolled factors such as spillover effects (see the text box for more information). Instead, quasi-experimental designs

demonstrate potential causal impact by ruling out other plausible explanations through rigorous measurement and control. Data generated through quasi-experimental methods are typically quantitative.

Quasi-Experimental Design

The SBA Learning Center is an online database that gives small business owners access to quick, relevant, accessible, and high-quality content. Once a user selects a course from the catalog, they view a pop-up registration form. Though not mandatory, upon seeing this form, about half of visitors abandoned the course without starting the course (45 percent). An updated version of the form was piloted that decreased the form fields, decreased the number of multiple choice questions, and re-ordered the questions in an intuitive order. It also indicated that completing the information was optional. These changes reduced the time required to complete the form but still collected the most critical information to the SBA. Program staff were able to compare the drop-off rate before and after this new form was instituted to determine if the new form led to a decrease in drop-off rates. In other words, did fewer visitors drop off with the shorter form, compared to the original form? Compared to the average drop-off rate of 45 percent, the shorter form resulted in a drop-off rate of 35 percent.

True experimental designs (alternately referred to as randomized control trials, or RCTs) involve the random assignment of potential program participants to either participate in or be excluded from the SBA program. These studies enable measurement of the causal impact and yield quantitative data that are analyzed for differences in results between groups based on program participation. True experiments can be used in evaluating SBA programs when:

- Clearly defined interventions can be manipulated and uniformly administered;
- There is no possibility that treatment will spill over to control groups (those for whom a program's intervention is not intended, see textbox); and
- It is ethical and feasible to deny a program's services to a group, at least for a long enough time to support the evaluation.

The Spillover Effect

The spillover effect occurs when participants of SBA programs share knowledge or strategies gained through participation in the program with non-participants. This effect is quite common, and it is desirable because the transfer of knowledge and best practices can lead to performance improvements from non-participants as well as participants. The spillover effect can pose a challenge to program evaluators in determining causality when non-participants gain the same knowledge as program participants, indirectly and not within measurable circles. For SBA programs, technical assistance is often designed to "spill over" to non-participants; programs are designed to impact small businesses well beyond those directly participating in the program. In these cases, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the effects of the program to measure the true impact in absence of spillover.

As previously discussed, true experimental designs are often not a practical reality for most SBA and social policy programs. This makes the demonstration of causal impacts difficult for SBA programs. The manipulation of a program's benefits, which would be central to the design of an RCT on an SBA program, runs counter to the spirit of spillover, or the sharing of a program's goals and philosophy, that SBA programs espouse and encourage. In these cases, quasi-experimental evaluation designs can provide meaningful findings to estimate the impact and/or attribution of the program.

Quasi-experimental and experimental designs can be very complex to implement unless the capacity to conduct them has been a central part of the program's initial design. As the complexity of the evaluation methodology increases, so too will the resources (money, time, and buy-in) required.

Therefore, regularly check in throughout the design selection phase to ensure that the evaluation methodology selected can be supported by available resources. You and your evaluator might determine that an evaluation question cannot be sufficiently answered with the evaluation design options available. In such instances, revisit the logic model to determine another evaluation question that fits within resource capacity.

Expert Review of the Evaluation Design

A final step that you should consider before implementing your evaluation is an external expert review of the selected evaluation design. These reviews will help ensure the actual and perceived quality and credibility of your evaluation. Before commissioning a review of your design, carefully consider the technical expertise of the intended audience, the availability of resources and time, and the function of the evaluation's results. Not all evaluations need to undergo an external review before the implementation is underway.

Selecting the Evaluation Design: The SBDC Experience Example

The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) program provides technical assistance to small business owners, managers, and prospective owners. SBDC service locations offer one-on-one counseling, training, and technical assistance in small business management.

To determine changes in sales and employment, jobs and sales revenue maintained, and financing obtained by small businesses that take advantage of these services, the program employed a quasi-experimental evaluation design. The performance improvements of the responding participants were compared to the weighted average changes in performance of all similar businesses in the U.S. The incremental improvements in the sample's performance above the average business (that did not receive the centers' services) were considered evidence of the centers' positive impact.

The evaluation was supplemented with qualitative and self-reported assessments of the program's impact. Specifically, respondents were asked to estimate the number of jobs saved and sales revenues maintained because of the counseling they received from the centers. They were also asked to indicate whether the SBDC program had assisted them in obtaining financing, and if so, the amount of debt and equity financing they were able to obtain as a direct result of the counseling received from the SBDC. Finally, respondents were asked a series of qualitative questions concerning the availability of comparable assistance from private consultants and the quality of those counselors.

Natural Experiments

One quasi-experimental method is known as a "natural experiment." You are best able to capitalize on this scenario if, as a part of your program design, you identify one group that is receiving a program intervention and another similar group that is not receiving the intervention or is receiving less of it. A natural experiment is only valid if the two groups are not systematically different on a dimension that might affect program outcomes, and if differences between the two groups can be reliably assessed.

For example, if the SBA clients of a program systematically receive different levels of counseling, this could serve as a natural experiment. Evaluators may be able to compare clients who received these differing levels of counseling to determine if higher levels of counseling positively affect program outcomes.

Building Smarter Data for Evaluating Business Assistance Programs: A Guide for Practitioners[9] outlines specific strategies for taking advantage of natural experiments. For example, datasets produced or housed by federal statistical agencies such as the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics can help identify comparable non-participants and can provide information about those non-participants.

[9] The report is available at https://www.sba.gov/document/report-building-smarter-data-evaluating-business-assistance-programs.

5.B. Implement the Evaluation

After you have settled on your evaluation questions and evaluation design, you are ready to implement the evaluation. To support this step, you may need to:

- Distribute the evaluation design, or a summary of it, to stakeholders, and subsequently communicate any schedule or other important changes to stakeholders during evaluation implementation.
- Review and provide feedback on interview guides, surveys, or other data collection instruments, if your evaluator did not finalize these during evaluation design.
- Make first contact with participants whom evaluators need to contact to inform them about the evaluation and encourage them to participate in data collection.
- Participate in periodic check-ins with your evaluator to ensure implementation is proceeding and to help address any implementation challenges.
- Assist in the contextual interpretation of analytical results.

Pilot Testing Evaluation Components

Pilot testing should take place before the full implementation of your evaluation. A pilot test involves testing tools or components of the evaluation, in a limited capacity, with a small number of informed respondents who can provide feedback on the effectiveness of the approach. For example, test a draft of interview questions/survey questions with up to nine people who represent (or are like) the people from whom the evaluation will ultimately be collecting data. Your evaluator might want to pilot test the sampling and data entry processes, particularly if different people will be collecting and/or entering information. Your evaluator might also want to revise the data collection instrument or processes based on the comments of the pilot respondents or trial runs at data collection. Once you and your evaluator are confident about and comfortable with the tools and processes you have selected, proceed to full implementation of the evaluation.

Protocols for Collecting and Housing Evaluation Data

You and your evaluator should agree to protocols for collecting and housing data during and after the implementation of your program evaluation. Issues to consider include:

- What form will my data take (e.g., text or numbers)?
- How much information will be collected, how often, and for how long?
- Do I anticipate that my data collection needs will grow or diminish in the future?

- What capabilities should my data management system have (e.g., a place to input and store data, software that will enable the analysis of quantitative or qualitative data)?
- What data management systems for the program currently exist? Could they fulfill my needs or be adapted to meet our needs?
- Who will need to have access to the data (e.g., SBA staff, the public)? What are the requirements for protecting the data during collection, transfer, and storage? Do I need to consult with SBA's Privacy Officer before collecting this data?

These issues can all be tested and potentially adjusted during the pre-test phase. Work with the program evaluation team to manage your evaluation data and determine if it should be consolidated using existing platforms and internal data dashboards. Dependent on the results of the evaluation, metrics or milestones may be developed and revisited monthly or quarterly to promote transparency and ensure accountability.

Data Analysis

Once data collection is complete, your evaluator will analyze and interpret the information collected and develop analytical findings. The nature of the analysis should adhere to the original methodology and design and will vary depending on the data collected (quantitative or qualitative; primary or secondary) and the purpose of the evaluation.

Quantitative Data

Often, quantitative data are collected and organized with the intent of being statistically analyzed; however, there are limitations on statistical analysis that can affect an SBA program's ability to conduct a valid statistical analysis. The most common barrier is confounding variables, which make it difficult to assign attribution to programs in a statistically robust way. Your evaluator can help you brainstorm ways to overcome this barrier that will enable you to draw inferences about causation or correlation in your sample.

If you are conducting an impact evaluation and have sufficient data, your evaluator can analyze the extent to which the relationship between your program and a change you have observed is statistically significant. These tests involve examining the relationship between ***dependent variables*** and ***independent variables*.**

Dependent variables are aspects of your program that are subjected to performance measurement and are the central focus of an outcome or impact evaluation. You are examining the degree to which your program produces a desired outcome, such as increased access to capital. ***Independent variables*** are those measured aspects of your program that you believe might have caused the observed change, such as the activities of the SBA program. Sometimes, you will collect data that will provide a sense of whether your program can reasonably (within the rules of statistical probability) conclude that there is a relationship between the dependent and independent variables. In other words, is your outcome unlikely to have resulted by chance (i.e., is this relationship statistically significant)?

In some other cases, you may theorize that a certain element of your program has been produced by your program's activities based on logic and reasoning that cannot be subjected to formal statistical tests, but that reasonably follow from other systematic methods. When working with your evaluator, be sure to ask:

- What types of analyses do our data support?
- What do the results tell us?
- How confident are you in the results? Are the results statistically significant?
- What do the results allow us to say about the relationship between the variables?
- Are there any findings that we predicted that the findings do not support?
- Are there any findings that run counter to our predictions or expectations?

Even if your quantitative data do not support an analysis of statistical significance, they still may be systematically analyzed to observe trends or relationships. At a minimum, your evaluator should also provide descriptive statistics such as means and medians, ranges, and quartiles, as appropriate.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data include any non-numerical data collected from interviews, surveys, focus groups, and other means. Essential to the analysis of qualitative data is the concept of coding. Coding is the process of categorizing information to identify themes, make comparisons, and identify patterns that require further investigation. Evaluators should categorize and organize their data in a manner that allows for a robust analysis of all the data they collected. Robust analyses of qualitative data involve multiple layers of coding. For example, a qualitative analysis may begin with open coding, assigning a brief phrase to represent each new idea in a response and then proceed to focused coding, where the many open codes are condensed into fewer categories, from which themes are then created and used to organize the findings and tell the story of the qualitative data collected.

In qualitative research, the term *rigor* is used to refer to findings that represent as closely as possible the experiences of the respondents. Rigor may be enhanced by employing triangulation. In general, triangulation involves analyzing all the qualitative data to determine if the themes produced from interviews align with the findings from the quantitative evaluation and provide additional context for the quantitative findings.

Example of Quantitative Analyses to Support Evaluation: The SBDC Experience

In 2011, questionnaires were sent to clients of the 60 SBDCs that participated in the evaluation. Clients were asked to evaluate the SBDC's services, provide their sales revenues and employment levels, estimate jobs and sales revenues maintained, and indicate the amount of financing they were able. In addition, clients were asked a series of qualitative questions concerning the availability of comparable assistance from private consultants and the quality of those counselors. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative information was collected in the questionnaire. Overall, 19 percent of clients returned questionnaires. To determine if the number of respondents was sufficient to obtain a reliable and valid estimation of the average changes in sales revenue and employment, confidence intervals around the mean were calculated. Evaluators also tested for sample validation, representativeness in the sample, response bias, and reliability. For quantitative data collected, weighted average values were calculated and then compared to non-clients' average values. Qualitative data were compiled and categorized for comparability. For example, clients were asked to evaluate their counselors' knowledge/expertise and working relationship on a five-point scale, from poor to excellent; these scores were counted and averaged.

Interpretation of Results

Your evaluator should have the technical expertise to undertake a proper content analysis for qualitative data or a statistical analysis for quantitative data. However, program managers and staff also play an important role in this analysis. You may be able to answer questions that enable the evaluator to identify and investigate potential data problems or other anomalies as they arise; give the evaluator feedback on what data analysis will meet the needs of your audience; and help provide context and insights during interpretation of the findings, including possible explanations for counterintuitive results.

Based on your expertise and familiarity with the program, you can provide insight into how analytical results should be interpreted and changes that may be needed to respond to the findings. The mere fact that the relationship between two variables is shown to be statistically significant does not necessarily mean that the finding is meaningful. The reverse is also true: if the relationship between two variables is not shown to be statistically significant, this does not mean that you cannot glean anything meaningful from your findings. You need to carefully review all results and determine which are meaningful and can guide possible changes in your program. You and your evaluator should work together to make sure that the data analysis is transparent and that results are interpreted appropriately. Through creating a safe space where everyone can speak honestly, problems can be uncovered. Through purposeful attention, improvements and solutions can be brainstormed and implemented.

Throughout the program evaluation process, your evaluator should share the “evolving story” that is emerging from the data, when appropriate (i.e., without jeopardizing data validity and the evaluation’s objectivity). In turn, the SBA program must keep the evaluator apprised of cultural and political sensitivities that could influence the form and format of how the results are presented. There should be no “surprises” when the final report is delivered.

Chapter 6: Disseminate and Implement Findings

Although communicating your results is one of the final steps in the evaluation process, you and your evaluator should start planning early for this important step. As discussed in Chapter 5.B, when implementing the evaluation, your evaluator will take primary responsibility for collecting and analyzing the data; however, the process of communicating evaluation results requires collaboration between the evaluator and SBA program staff.

Careful consideration of your program's stakeholders will influence how to best organize and deliver evaluation results. The results have three basic elements: ***findings***, ***conclusions***, and ***recommendations***.

Data collected during the implementation of the project will yield ***findings***. Findings refer to the raw data and summary analyses. Because the findings are a part of the data analysis process, the evaluator should retain the primary responsibility for communicating findings to the program staff and management. Evaluators often deliver findings to the SBA program in a draft report or preliminary findings briefing.

4. Plan and Prepare
A. Plan the Evaluation
B. Identify Key Stakeholders
C. Develop or Update the Program Logic Model and Learning Priorities
D. Develop Evaluation Questions
5. Conduct and Monitor
A. Set an Evaluation Design
B. Implement the Evaluation
6. Disseminate and Implement Findings
A. Communicate Evaluation Results
B. Implement Recommendations

Conclusions represent the interpretation of the findings, given the context and specific operations of your SBA program. Your evaluator may independently derive some initial interpretations. However, program managers and staff should have an opportunity to provide comments based on the draft report and/ or preliminary findings briefing, to suggest ways to refine or contextualize the interpretation of the findings. A strong evaluator will want to ensure that the conclusions of the project are sound, relevant, and useful.

Regardless of the design or data collection employed, there will be some limitations to the explanatory power of any methodology used. Make sure that your evaluator has clearly pointed out the limitations of the findings based on the design selected when framing and reporting conclusions from the evaluation.

Recommendations are based on the findings and conclusions of your evaluation. The lead program evaluator will understand that framing recommendations is an iterative process that should involve obtaining feedback from SBA program managers, staff, and key stakeholders. Executive champion and staff involvement in the development of recommendations is important, as most recommendations are designed to lead to changes in how programs work. One of the greatest sources of value from program evaluation is implementing evaluation recommendations and seeing the resulting improvements. This is discussed more in Chapter 6.B.

Preliminary results and draft reports should be shared with core evaluation team members (at a minimum) for their feedback. Staff members who are directly involved in the program's activities are likely to have a critical role in helping to interpret draft findings and make suggestions to the evaluator during the development of

conclusions and recommendations. Your evaluator may also consult published literature and other experts in the area to make sure recommendations are objective, informed, and appropriate.

Despite the collaboration throughout the evaluation process and the need for active discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations as discussed above, the evaluation contractor should prepare drafts of findings, conclusions, recommendations, and final report text. Granting this autonomy to your evaluation contractor will help ensure that the report is objective and not unduly influenced by the vested interests and stakeholders who might be affected—directly or indirectly—by the findings. This autonomy will also make the evaluation less vulnerable to any potential criticism from external reviewers or stakeholders.

Questions To Ask About Your Results

- Do the results make sense?
- Do the results provide answers to evaluation questions?
- Can the evaluation results be attributed to the program?
- What are some possible explanations for findings that are surprising?
- Have we missed other indicators or confounding variables?
- How will the results help you identify actions to improve the program?

6.A. Communicate Evaluation Results

4. Plan and Prepare
A. Plan the Evaluation
B. Identify Key Stakeholders
C. Develop or Update the Program Logic Model and Learning Priorities
D. Develop Evaluation Questions
5. Conduct and Monitor
A. Set an Evaluation Design
B. Implement the Evaluation
6. Disseminate and Implement Findings
A. Communicate Evaluation Results
B. Implement Recommendations

Before determining the design and format of communications, consider if there is harm from sharing results and how to possibility mitigate it. Next, you and your evaluator should work closely to determine the level of detail and format of the draft report and tailor presentations of evaluation results to the specific needs of your stakeholders. Key questions you and your evaluator should ask in presenting results are:

- What evaluation questions are most relevant to these stakeholders?
- How do they prefer to receive information?
- How much detail do they want?
- Are they likely to read an entire report?
- Consider who is not at the table, and why. Is there a strategy in place for making sure those who have provided data have the results?

Based on the answers to these questions, in addition to a full-length report, you can opt for alternative reporting formats depending on the needs of each stakeholder group. Common reporting methods include a shortened version of the evaluation report for broad distribution; briefing(s) that may use slides or other visual aids; and evaluation fact sheet(s).

At a minimum, you and your evaluator's communication of evaluation results should include the following steps:

- Present preliminary results and findings to program staff and other relevant stakeholders (e.g., SBA senior leadership).
- Prepare a program evaluation report.
- Conduct a final recommendation briefing to SBA senior leadership.
- Create a summary fact sheet of the evaluation's key findings and recommendations.
- Publish findings; work with the SBA program evaluation team to disseminate your evaluation findings through the SBA Program Evaluation & Evidence Registry (PEER).

Tying your findings directly to the evaluation questions strengthens the applicability and relevance of your results. Organizing your findings and recommendations in a way that clearly makes this link will ensure that you have collected and are reporting on the key questions that the evaluation was designed to answer. Here are some tips to assist you in planning for the application of evaluation results:

- Consider whether the results support or challenge the linkages you expected to see in your logic model. Work with program staff and your evaluator to consider a reasonable set of explanations for the results obtained.
- Review the literature to determine if results are consistent with findings published and presented on similar programs (if applicable).
- Work with technical experts and program personnel to develop evidence-based explanations to interpret your results.
- If some results were unexpected, develop a set of possible explanations that might explain counterintuitive findings.
- Consult with stakeholders and external experts to develop a list of actionable items that can inform management decisions; these items might be used later to frame recommendations.
- Consider any methodological deficits of your evaluation strategy and consider design shortcomings when applying the results to your program management directives.
- Ensure that your results are transparent and that you share expected as well as counterintuitive results. Do not suppress findings. Obtaining results inconsistent with your logic model does not necessarily suggest that the core goals of your program are not worth pursuing, and including such findings will boost the integrity of your report.
- Suggest future research or evaluations that should follow from the current evaluation effort.
- Build the means for future evaluations into your program infrastructure (e.g., reliable record-keeping, accessible storage of data, valid measurement of baselines for new program activities), so that future program evaluations will have the advantage of having useful records to answer evaluation questions.

Checklist for Reporting Results and Conclusions (Yes or No)	
Linkage of results to logic model is clear	
Conclusions and results are clearly presented and address key evaluation questions	
Clear discussion of next steps is included	
Stakeholders have participated in decisions concerning outreach method	
Stakeholders are provided with opportunity for comment before evaluation is finalized	

Communication of Evaluation Results: The Scaleup America Evaluation

SBA's ScaleUp America program completed an evaluation in August of 2016, concluding with a final report: Office of Entrepreneurial Development ScaleUp America Evaluation Year 1. In accordance with evaluation reporting best practices, this report presents evaluation findings by each key evaluation question and summarizes conclusions and recommendations by research question in the Lessons and Conclusions chapter. As part of this evaluation, staff members in the Office of Entrepreneurial Development provided feedback to the external contractor on early to ensure that the contractor had enough time to review and address comments.

6.B. Implement Recommendations

One of the greatest sources of value from program evaluation is implementing evaluation recommendations and seeing the resulting improvements. Toward the end of an evaluation, you should coordinate with performance analysts in SBA's Office of Program Performance, Analysis and Evaluation to develop an implementation plan. This plan should include:

- Recommendations for implementation;
- Anticipated results based on implementing the recommendations;
- Actions planned to implement recommendations;
- Action budget; and
- Timeline for completing actions and implementing recommendations.

Your evaluation plan should receive approval and support from relevant senior leadership. This approval will help ensure that programmatic resources are sufficient to implement the recommendations. Before dissemination to the public, the respective program office senior leader, the Chief Evaluation Officer, and the Performance Improvement Officer must provide clearance. Reports should be made available to the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs before publication online.

The implementation plan should also include methods to track and monitor the implementation of recommendations.

Appendix A: Roles and Responsibilities in the Program Evaluation

***Executive Champion*:** A member of senior management who has championed an evaluation study and will stay apprised of the program evaluation's progress. The executive champion will ensure that programmatic resources (i.e., staff time, access to relevant data, introductions to external stakeholders) are sufficient. The champion will be informed of the study design and potential limitations, receive regular study progress updates, and provide feedback and guidance to ensure that the results and recommendations generated from the evaluation are leveraged by management for performance improvements.

***Chief Evaluation Officer*:** A senior executive of the agency who provides strategic direction, policy oversight and advice on goals, objectives, strategy, metrics, and evidence to guide the Agency's mission, improve program effectiveness, and ensure operational efficiency. At the SBA, the Chief Evaluation Officer is the Director of Program Performance, Analysis and Evaluation.

***Lead Program Evaluator*:** A staff member with technical expertise in program evaluation, research methods (e.g., survey design and qualitative research), and data analysis. This individual possesses the skillset to manage, conduct, and serve as a Contracting Officer's Representative for external contractors commissioned to conduct program evaluations. During the pre-award stage of an evaluation, the Lead Program Evaluator prepare the requirements for evaluations and will convene a team with relevant subject-matter expertise to review proposals and make recommendations about which proposals to support.

Program Evaluation Team: All stakeholders of a program who are actively engaged in the evaluation process. This team will typically include staff members working with the program, program partners internal and external to the organization, a lead program evaluator (Contracting Officer's Representative), an executive champion, and members of a contracting team conducting the program evaluation.

***Performance Analyst*:** A team member of the Performance Management Division who coordinates and manages performance management activity. The performance analyst works with program offices on performance planning, measurement analysis, regular assessment of progress towards goals, and the use of performance information to ensure that programs are operating efficiently and effectively.

***Project Liaison*:** A program staff member who represents the program in evaluation meetings arranged by the Lead Program Evaluator/COR, and continually provides subject matter expertise and reviews of deliverables. The project liaison reports to their executive champion to inform them of evaluation-related achievements, challenges, and needs. The project liaison is involved throughout the evaluation to ensure that project deadlines are met and that evaluation-relevant communications intended for the contractor are sent to the COR for review and further dissemination.

Evaluation Contractor: The external evaluator hired to independently conduct a program evaluation for an agency. The contractor will be a professional program evaluator who ensures objectivity of the evaluation study. The contractor will have expertise in program evaluation, data analytics, and organizational change management, and will scope the evaluation questions to ensure that the selected research design will allow for a comprehensive investigation of each question.

Appendix B: Glossary

***Activities**:* The actions taken to implement a program. Examples of SBA program activities include developing and maintaining a program website, offering trainings, issuing grants, processing loans, approving certifications, developing policy, and establishing relationships with partners.

***Attribution**:* The assertion that certain events or conditions were, to some extent, caused or influenced by other events or conditions. In program evaluation, attribution means a causal link can be made between a specific outcome and the actions and outputs of a program.

***Baseline**:* Initial information on a program or program components collected before receipt of services or participation activities. Baseline data provide a frame of reference for the change that you want the SBA program to initiate. These data represent the current state of the economy, community, or sector before your program begins. Baseline data can also approximate what results might have been in the absence of the program.

***Coding**:* The process of categorizing information to identify themes, make comparisons, and identify patterns that require further investigation.

***Conclusions**:* The interpretation of the evaluation findings, given the context and specific operations of a program.

***Confounding Variable**:* A variable that when combined with a program's activities or inputs may mask the results.

***Contribution**:* The assertion that a program is statistically correlated with subsequent events or conditions, even after you have accounted for non-program factors also associated with the same events and conditions.

***Control Group**:* A group whose characteristics are similar to those of the program, but which did not receive the program services, products, or activities being evaluated. Collecting and comparing the same information for program participants and non-participants enables evaluators to assess the effect of program activities.

***Customers**:* See "Target Decision-Makers."

***Dependent Variable**:* The variable that represents what you are trying to influence with a program. It answers the question "what do I observe" (e.g., economic results).

***Enterprise Learning Agenda**:* (see "Learning Agenda") Focuses evaluation activities by prioritizing evaluation questions that will have the greatest usefulness across the Agency.

***Evaluand**:* The subject of an evaluation; typically, the program undertaking the evaluation.

***Evaluation**:* The individual, systematic collection of data to assess program, policy, project, or operational effectiveness, efficiency, or implementation fidelity.

***Evaluation Methodology**:* The methods, procedures, and techniques used to collect and analyze information for the evaluation.

***Evaluation Questions**:* The broad questions the evaluation is designed to answer and the bridge between the description of how a program is intended to operate and the data necessary to support claims about program success.

***Evaluation Users**:* Most SBA program managers and staff, who often have limited knowledge of program evaluation but benefit from and see the value of evaluations. From time to time, evaluation users might be called upon to participate in the evaluation process.

***Evidence Registry**:* A registry of evaluations, research, and other evidence that supports decision-making. The public-facing SBA Program Evaluation & Evidence Registry (PEER) features research conducted by SBA programs and others to help answer what works in small business assistance programs and to make those answers broadly available so that senior management, program managers, policymakers, researchers, and the public can make evidence-based decisions.

***Expert Review**:* An impartial assessment of the evaluation methodology by experts who are not otherwise involved with the program or the evaluation; a form of peer review. The Peer Review Handbook outlines requirements for the peer review of major scientific and technical work products and provides useful tips for managing expert reviews.

***External Influences**:* Positive or negative factors beyond your control that can affect the ability of your program to reach its desired outcomes.

***Feasibility**:* The extent to which an evaluation design is practical, including having an adequate budget, data collection and analysis capacity, staff time, and stakeholder buy-in required to answer evaluation questions.

***Findings**:* The raw data and summary analyses obtained from the respondents in a program evaluation.

***Functionality**:* The extent to which information collected through the evaluation process can be acted upon by program staff.

***Impact Evaluation**:* An evaluation that focuses on questions of program causality. It allows claims to be made with some degree of certainty about the link between the program and outcomes, and it assesses the net effect of a program by comparing program outcomes with an estimate of what would have happened in the absence of the program.

***Independent Variable**:* The variable that represents the hypothesized cause (e.g., SBA program activities) of the observations during the evaluation.

***Indicator**:* A measure, usually quantitative, that provides information on program performance and evidence of a change in the “state or condition” of the system.

***Information Collection Request (ICR)**:* A set of documents that describe reporting, recordkeeping, survey, or other information collection requests of the public by federal agencies. The ICR provides an overview of the

collection and an estimate of the cost and time for the public to respond.

***Intermediate-Term Outcomes**:* Changes in behavior that are broader in scope than short-term outcomes and often build on the progress achieved in the short-term.

***Learning Agenda**:* A continuous improvement program tool that creates a structure for a program to consider its evaluation priorities. This tool assists program managers address questions using evaluative approaches and evidence to inform decision-making, ultimately increasing program efficiency and effectiveness.

Logic Model: A diagram with text that describes and illustrates the components of a program and the causal relationships among program components and the problems they are intended to solve, thus defining the measurement of success. Essentially, a logic model visually represents what a program does and how it intends to accomplish its goals.

***Long-Term Outcomes**:* The overarching goals of the program, such as changes in economic conditions.

***Mean**:* A measure of central tendency sometimes referred to as the average; the sum of the values divided by the number of values.

***Median**:* A measure of central tendency; the number separating the upper and lower halves of a sample. The median can be found by ordering the numbers from lowest to highest and finding the middle number.

***Natural Experiment**:* Situations that approximate a controlled experiment; that is, they have "natural" comparison and treatment groups. This scenario provides evaluators with the opportunity to compare program participants with a group that is not receiving the program offered. Natural experiments are not randomized, and therefore, strong causal claims of direct impact cannot be made. Evidence is required to show that the comparison group is a reasonable approximation of an experimental control group.

***Non-Experimental Design**:* A research design in which the evaluator can describe what has occurred but cannot control or manipulate the provision of the treatment to participants as in a true experimental design or approximate control using strong quasi-experimental methods.

***Outcome Evaluation**:* An evaluation that assesses a mature program's success in reaching its stated goals. It focuses on outputs and outcomes (including unintended effects) to assess program effectiveness or process to understand connection to outcomes. Often, outcome evaluations are appropriate only when at least baseline and post-baseline data sets are available or could be developed.

***Outputs**:* The immediate products that result from activities, often used to measure short-term progress.

***Participatory Evaluation**:* An evaluation that involves stakeholders in all aspects of the evaluation, including design, data collection, analysis, and communication of findings.

***Program Manager**:* The person responsible for determining what programs should be evaluated and when these evaluations should take place. Managers do not necessarily need to have the technical expertise to conduct an evaluation but should be aware of the basic structure of the evaluation process, so they can make informed decisions when commissioning evaluations and using findings to make management decisions.

***Performance Measure**:* An objective metric used to gauge program performance in achieving objectives and goals. Performance measures can address the type or level of program activities conducted (process), the direct products and services delivered (outputs), or the results of those products and services (outcomes).

***Primary Data**:* Data collected "firsthand" by your SBA program specifically for the evaluation.

***Process Evaluation**:* An evaluation that assesses the extent to which a program is operating as it was intended. Process evaluations typically determine if all essential program elements are in place and operating efficiently and effectively. Process evaluations can also be used to analyze mature programs under some circumstances, such as when you are considering changing the mechanics of the program.

***Program Design Evaluation**:* An evaluation most appropriately conducted during program development; it can be helpful when staff have been charged with developing a new program. Program design evaluations provide a means for programs to evaluate the strategies and approaches that are most useful for a program to achieve its goals.

***Program Evaluation**:* A systematic study that uses objective measurement and analysis to answer specific questions about how well a program is working to achieve its outcomes and why. Evaluation has several distinguishing characteristics relating to focus, methodology, and function. Evaluation 1) assesses the effectiveness of an ongoing program in achieving its objectives, 2) relies on the standards of project design to distinguish a program's effects from those of other forces, and 3) aims to improve programs by modifying current operations.

***Qualitative Data**:* Describes the attributes or properties of a program's activities, outputs, or outcomes. Qualitative data can be difficult to measure, count, or express in numerical terms; therefore, data are sometimes converted into a form that enables summarization through a systematic process (e.g., content analysis, behavioral coding). This data may be unstructured and contain a high degree of subjectivity, such as free responses to open-ended questions.

***Quantitative Data**:* Can be expressed in numerical terms, counted, or compared on a scale. Measurement units (e.g., feet and inches) are associated with quantitative data.

***Quartile**:* The three data points that divide a data set into four equal parts.

***Quasi-Experimental Design**:* A research design with some, but not all, characteristics of an experimental design. Like randomized control trials (see below), these evaluations assess the differences that result from participation in program activities and the result that would have occurred without participation. The control activity (comparison group) is not randomly assigned. Instead, a comparison group is developed or identified through non-random means, and systematic methods are used to rule out confounding factors other than the program that could produce or mask differences between the program and non- program groups.

***Randomized Control Trial (RCT)**:* An experimental study that is characterized by random assignment to program treatments (at least one group receives the goods or services offered by a program, and at least one group—a control group—does not). Both groups are measured post-treatment. The random assignment enables the evaluator to assert with confidence that no other factors other than the program produced the outcomes achieved.

***Range**:* The difference between the highest and lowest value in a sample.

***Recommendations**:* Suggestions for the SBA program based on the evaluation's findings and conclusions.

***Reliability**:* The extent to which a measurement instrument yields consistent, stable, and uniform results over repeated observations or measurements under the same conditions.

***Research**:* The systematic use of scientific methods for the creation of new knowledge to describe, explain, predict, and control an observed phenomenon.

***Resources**:* The basic inputs of funds, staffing, and knowledge dedicated to the program.

***Secondary Data**:* Data taken from existing sources and re-analyzed for a different purpose.

***Short-Term Outcomes**:* The changes in awareness, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, or skills resulting from program outputs.

***Spillover Effects**:* Improvements by non-participants due to transfers of attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, or technology from program participants.

***Stakeholder**:* Any person or group that has an interest in the program being evaluated or in the results.

***Stakeholder Involvement Plan**:* A plan to identify relevant stakeholder groups to determine the appropriate level of involvement for each group and engage each group in the evaluation accordingly.

***Targets**:* Improved level of performance needed to achieve stated goals.

***Target Decision-Makers**:* The groups and individuals targeted by program activities and outputs, also known as the target audience or program participants.

***Validity**:* The extent to which a data collection technique accurately measures what it is supposed to measure.

Appendix C: Evaluation Resources

SBA Program Evaluation Resources

- SBA's Enterprise Learning Agenda: https://www.sba.gov/document/report-enterprise-learning-agenda
- SBA's Annual Evaluation Plan: https://www.sba.gov/document/report-annual-evaluation-plan

Other Online Evaluation Resources

Logic Modeling

- University of Wisconsin Extension Logic Models

Program Evaluation

- W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Evaluation Handbook. Contains resources on developing evaluation questions, plans, budgeting for evaluation, managing a contractor, and checklists. Includes the Evaluation Handbook and Logic Model Development Guide.
- U.S. Government Accountability Office, Designing Evaluations. Policy and guidance materials on evaluations, evaluation design, case study evaluation, and prospective evaluation methods.
- The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University. Excellent resource for evaluation checklists, instructional materials, publications, and reports.
- Online Evaluation Resource Library. Contains evaluation instruments, plans, reports, and instructional materials on project evaluation design and methods of collecting data.
- Web Center for Social Research Methods: Site provides resources and links to other locations on the web that deal in applied program evaluation methods, including an online hypertext textbook on applied methods, an online statistical advisor, and a collection of manual and computer simulation exercises of common evaluation designs for evaluators to learn how to do simple simulations.

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