Evaluation Brief #4
Determinants of Success in Evaluation, Part 1

There are many factors that determine whether a program evaluation is successful. This brief highlights the most common factors that can affect the evaluation process and utilization of results.

Relevance

Evaluation must be relevant from the start. An evaluation is most likely to succeed if it reflects knowledge of the context in which a program operates and appeals to decision-makers' information needs.[1] Relevance could be ensured by achieving consensus with decision-makers on the evaluation purpose and developing evaluation questions that respond to the decision-makers' information needs.[1,2] The **right questions** must be asked.

Use of Findings

Evidence demonstrates that when evaluation findings match decision-makers' expectations, the acceptance and utilization of those findings increases.[1] The likelihood of using findings is even greater when they are practical and conclusive or offer alternative courses of action for decision-makers.[1] Findings need to **sound right**.

Credibility

Evaluators must maintain a high standard of practice, specifically demonstrating professional integrity and objectivity throughout the evaluation process.[1,2] Evidence suggests that when evaluators are perceived by decision-makers as reputable or having high face validity, their engagement in evaluation and use of evaluation findings is likely to be greater.[1] Evaluators must **do right** by the evaluation standards.

Evaluation Rigour

Evaluations need to be carried out in a rigorous manner, using appropriate design, sampling and data collection methods.[1,2] Complex programs (e.g., multi-component interventions) or limited resources (e.g. money, staff, time) can make program evaluation challenging. Nevertheless, every effort should be made to ensure that evaluations are done in a **rigorous way**.

Communication Quality

The ways evaluation findings are presented (via specific format) and disseminated (via specific channels) affect how and whether findings are actually used.[1,2] Findings need to be reported in ways preferred among stakeholders, such as a report, a presentation, an infographic, a video, etc. The **right person** needs to receive findings in the **right way**.

Timeliness of Reporting

It is important that evaluations are completed on time, in order to ensure timeliness of decision-making. Receiving evaluation findings beyond the window of opportunity affects the appropriateness of decisions and could render the findings useless and irrelevant.[1,2] The reports and findings need to arrive at the **right time**.

References

1. Cousins, B., Leithwood, K. (1986). Current empirical research on evaluation utilization. *Review of Educational Research*, 56(3), 331-364.

2. Neuman, A., Shahor, N., Shina, I., Sarid, A., Saar, Z. (2013). Evaluation utilization research: Developing a theory and putting it to use. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 36, 64-70.

"Not everything that can be counted counts. Not everything that counts can be counted"
 - William Bruce Cameron, *Informal Sociology: A Casual Introduction to Sociological Thinking*