

The role, purpose, and potential of evaluation (for addressing inequities)

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Why do we do evaluations?

- Many possible answers
- A partial list momentarily
- First, an exercise

Types of use as a way to answer: Why do evaluation?

- Multiple forms of use
 - Instrumental/direct
 - Enlightenment/conceptual
 - Symbolic/legitimizing
 - More recently, process

Many evaluation theories, emphasizing different evaluation purposes, e.g.

- Impact evaluations for selection from among options
- Program improvement, e.g. by addressing info needs of program managers
- Ask what works, when, and for whom
- General learning
- Ongoing construction of an initiative
- Development of learning organizations
- Creating forum for democratic deliberation
- Social justice
- Empowerment of individuals
- And on and on

Beyond the many evaluation models, multiple questions for evaluation, e.g.

- Feasibility of implementing a new program type
- Quality of implementation
- Compliance with regulations, e.g. about client eligibility
- Cost
- Client compliance, retention, perceptions
- Ability to scale up



Why do we do evaluation?

- To make a difference (even if indirectly)
- To contribute to better outcomes for intended beneficiaries
- And there are many pathways for this
- Aside: Evaluation use is a means, not an end in itself

Interventions aimed at health inequities vary. Consider:

- Complexity of intervention
 - With a collection of “theories”
 - Specificity of intended effect(s)
 - Amount of background knowledge
 - Durability of motivating problem
 - Likely time course of change
 - Messiness of causal background
- Need evaluation options to match situations

Implications for evaluation of health equity

- How much is known for the more complex interventions/ those targeted at broader set of outcomes?
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- Need for evaluation as a vehicle for learning
- Timeline, expectations
- Even aspirations for influencing portfolio of interventions

And keep in mind

- The ‘guiding star’ is not evaluation model or method choice per se
- It’s the potential for evaluation to make a difference, to have positive consequences, to contribute to social betterment
 - Think of evaluation as an intervention
 - Consider the equivalent of “program theory”
 - Plan to have influence, revising as circumstances change

A noble aspiration