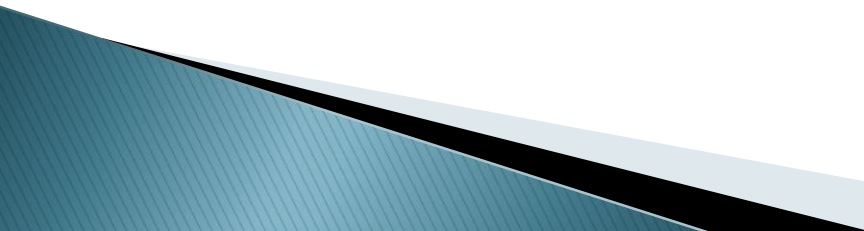# Accountability and Performance Assessment in the Voluntary Sector

Chapter 9 and Suggested Readings 4 & 6

Terminology

- Evaluation – evidence based periodic assessment, which is as systematic, impartial and credible as possible, aimed at determining the relevance, impact, cost effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the project or program and which attempts to identify best alternatives so as to inform an organization's strategic decision making.

- Monitoring – a continuing function that provides managers and stakeholders with early and ongoing indicators about progress.
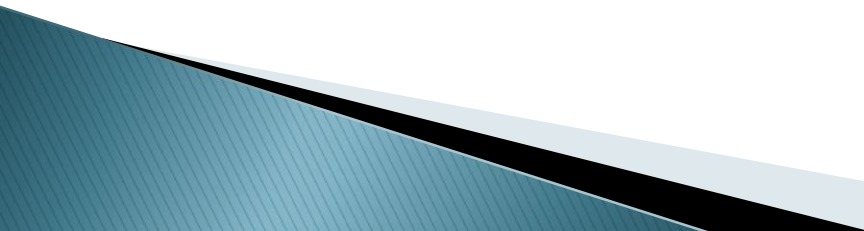
Terminology

- Audit – an independent assurance activity to determine compliance with an effectiveness of an organization's risk management systems.

- Performance assessment – more encompassing than evaluation, designating an ongoing, routinized process rather than an episodic snapshot. Often includes monitoring, benchmarking, and the use of indicators in measurement of results rather than activities.

- Evaluation and performance assessment are interdependent as evaluation is a mechanism for developing appropriate measures and indictors for ongoing monitoring and performance assessment, and ongoing assessment often generates data that can be used in evaluation.
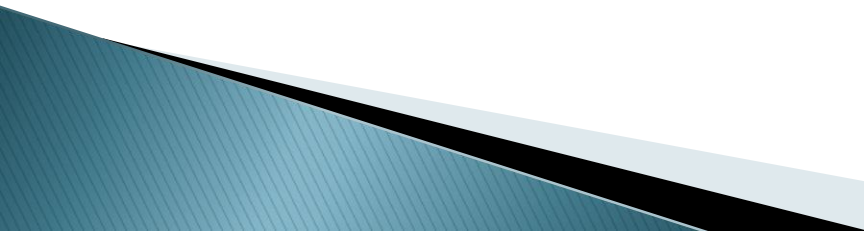
Terminology

- Performance management – encompasses broader issues of institutional design, co-ordination, and organizational culture that enable assessment to be no only a driver of change, but a common language for achieving collective goals. Here, the focus shifts upward to the broader process of strategic planning and building the organization.
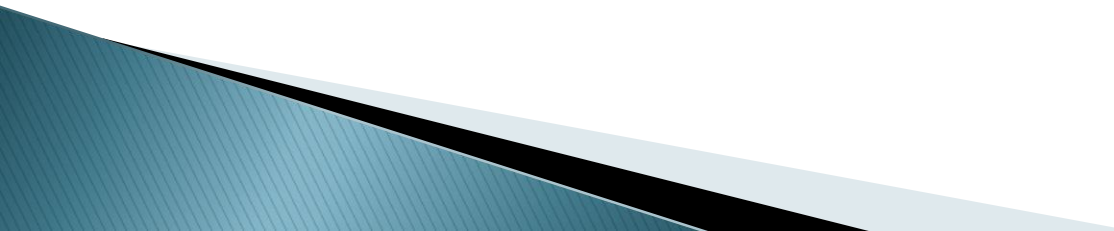
Rising Expectations – Evaluation Practices

- The pressures for more and better evaluation are driven both internally, by boards, staff, and volunteers concerned about making effective use of scarce resources, and externally, mainly by a variety of funders and by the need to demonstrate value in a crowded public space.

- The introduction of New Public Management (NPM) with its emphasis on consumers, privatization, contracting out and market-based policy instruments, created and explosion in auditing in Canada and elsewhere.

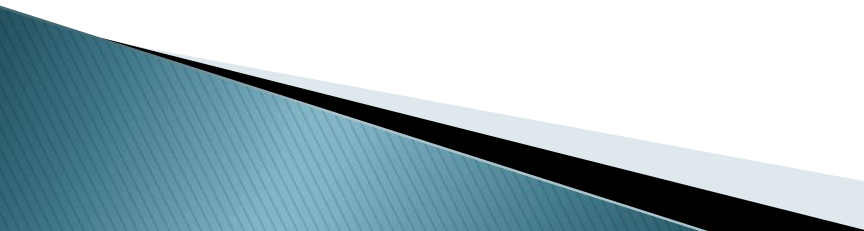# Rising Expectations – Evaluation Practices

- Across a large part of the government, managers shifted from supervising and delivering programs directly to managing contracts for services no provided by third parties.

- Assurances of quality in the expanded contracting culture created under NPM were provided by extended reporting requirements and by increased demands for evaluation of programs and projects.
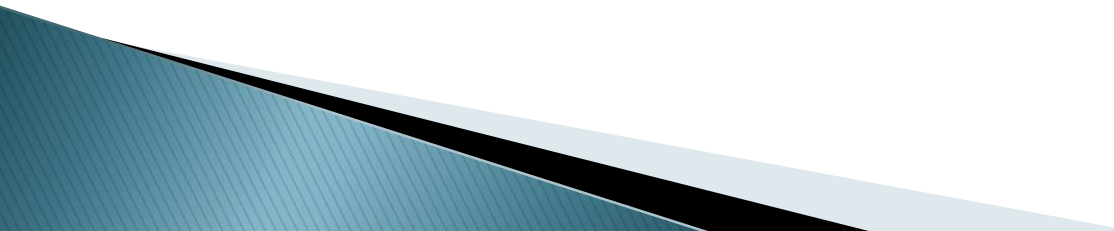
Rising Expectations – Evaluation Practices

- With funding cuts and increased demand for services, organizations need to make tough decisions so evaluation has taken on a new importance.

- The focus of what to evaluate has moved from activities and outputs to evidence-based outcomes or results-based measurements.

Rising Expectations – Evaluation Practices

- In March 2000, the federal government adopted a comprehensive management framework known as Results for Canadians that committed departments to be more results-oriented and was dedicated to responsible spending.

- The new management framework meant that public service managers are expected to define strategic outcomes, continually focus attention on results achievement, measure performance regularly and objectively learn from this information and adjust to improve efficiency and effectiveness.
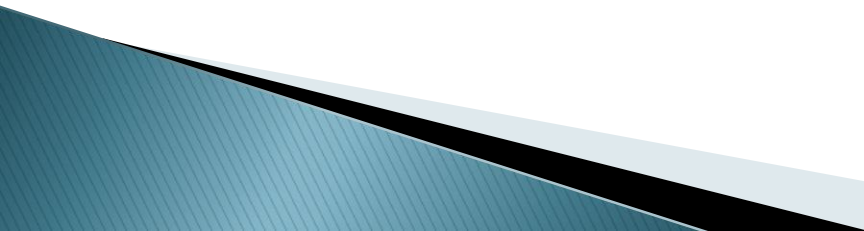
Rising Expectations – Evaluation Practices

- In 1997, the Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector (PAGVS), chaired by Ed Broadbent, was charged with reviewing, consulting and making recommendations on how the sector could improve its own practices.

- The Panel took a very broad perspective on accountability, considering both internal and external accountabilities and giving significant attention to the voluntary sector's relationship with the federal government, which holds the main responsibility for the regulation of charities.

Rising Expectations – Evaluation Practices

- In 1999, the Panel's report paved the way for the creation of the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) a five year process established by the Government of Canada in 2000 to encourage a better relationship and enhance capacity in the sector.

- The Panel noted in their report that better performance measurement had to be a joint effort with funders, with a strong supporting role played by intermediary organizations (federations, umbrellas, and research organizations). Mainly calling funders to use more multi-year funding, cover the costs of evaluation and consider more core funding and to begin sustained dialogue with voluntary organizations.

Rising Expectations – Evaluation Practices

- A second development from PAGVS was the establishment of very stringent control-based accountability regime related to contribution agreements that came as a response to a scandal over grants and contributions at the largest federal department in 2000.

- The new accountability requirements have had a serious negative impact on the voluntary sector: delaying approvals for projects, stifling innovations, increasing time and administrative staff with minutiae of reporting.

Rising Expectations – Evaluation Practices

- Even more controls were imposed on recipients of government funding, the internal audit was significantly expanded, and multiple oversight organizations were created following the Gomery Inquiry of 2005–06 into inappropriate contracting (with the private sector) under the federal sponsorship program.

- The Federal Accountability Act (2006) contained multiple integrity and control provisions for government contracting processes, strengthened auditing practices within departments and required contributions programs be evaluated every five years.

Rising Expectations – Evaluation Practices

▶ Evolution to Evaluation as a Management Tool
◦ Evaluation can help program managers to:

- Ensure that the program is doing what one thinks its doing;

- Understand if the program is making a difference and what effect it has on users;

- Improve program delivery mechanisms and refine eligibility criteria, program objectives and other program processes; and

- Identify the lessons learned, and act upon the findings

Rising Expectations – Evaluation Practices

▸ Evolution to Evaluation as a Management Tool

◦ The first step is becoming competent and confident in doing evaluations of a variety of activities from assessing programs to the organization overall. This involves knowing when and how to evaluate what.

◦ The second step is to build assessment into governance processes and the routine operations of an organization, and develop the capacity as the organization to do this.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

- Evaluation design depends on what decisions need to be made with regard to the program, what information is needed to make these decisions and what kinds of resources are available to managers.

- Key Considerations in designing evaluations are:
  ◦ Evaluation and Audience
  ◦ Program readiness
  ◦ Focus of Evaluation
  ◦ Choice of Evaluator
  ◦ Data Collection methods and sources of information

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▸ Why: Evaluation and Audience

◦ The first evaluation question that needs to be asked is WHY evaluation is being undertaken.

◦ Typically evaluations are undertaken to serve one or more of three general purposes:

- **Accountability:** to demonstrate the results of programs and account for the use of resources;

- **Program planning or improvement:** to identify strengths and weaknesses of a program or process, as well as appropriate changes to make; and/or

- **Knowledge generation or enlightenment:** to create a new understanding about what works and what does not, understand the nature of specific social interventions and generate new knowledge.
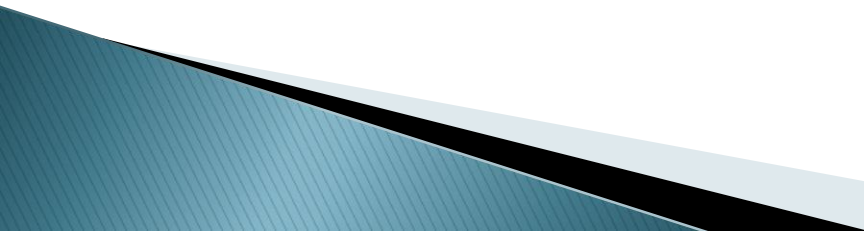
Evaluation Issues:
The Meta-Questions

▸ Why: Evaluation and Audience
  ◦ **Accountability:** to demonstrate the results of programs and account for the use of resources;

    • Evaluation for Accountability purposes is often externally driven and frequently referred to as a summative evolution.

    • Summative evaluations are done at the end of a program or project and are designed for decision-making purposes about whether to continue or end a program, extend it to other sites, or cut it back.

    • Limitations to summative evaluations are that the evaluation demonstrating the accountability for the use of money often ignore the 'how' and 'why' information; and

    • May result in the diversion of resources from program improvement to documentation, record keeping, report writing, auditing and related activities.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▶ Why: Evaluation and Audience

◦ **Program planning or improvement:** to identify strengths and weaknesses of a program or process, as well as appropriate changes to make.

• Evaluation for program improvement is often referred to as formative evaluation.

• Formative evaluation are consistent with a focus on learning and are designed to assist in the early stages those who are developing programs and can be used as management tools for identifying what works and what does not and how things can be improved.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

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Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▶ When: Program Readiness

- The WHEN to evaluate can be systematically thought about through a procedure called evaluability assessment.

- Evaluability assessment seeks to determine in a systematic way whether or not programs are ready for evaluation.

- The products of evaluability assessments are:
  - A set of agreed-on program objectives, side effects and performance indicators on which the program can realistically be held accountable; and

  - A set of evaluation/management options which represent ways in which management can change program activities, objectives, or uses of information in ways likely to improve program performance.
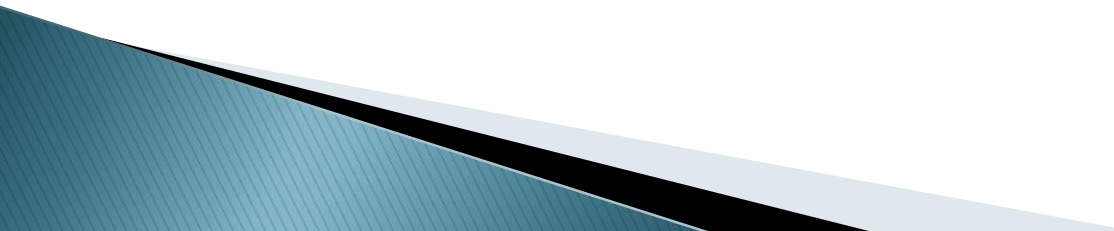
Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▸ When: Program Readiness
  ◦ Readiness for evaluation is assessed against three main criteria:
    • Does the program operate as intended?
    • Is it relatively stable?
    • Does it seem to be achieving positive outcomes?

  ◦ Assessing a program against these criteria requires clarifying the goals, boundaries and theory of the program; interviewing stakeholders and identifying their needs, concerns and differences in perceptions; determining the plausibility of a program model; and making specific recommendations with regard to the evaluability of the program.

Evaluation Issues:
The Meta-Questions

▸ When: Program Readiness
  ◦ The main caution in this process is against oversimplification and that these assessments can be both time consuming and expensive.

  ◦ Keep in mind that programs can often be recursive rather than linear and represent a complex set of outcomes, both intended and unintended.

  ◦ Key stakeholders time and commitment may be difficult to obtain and program documentation may be disorganized.

  ◦ The proper use of evaluability assessments, however, may increase the probability that actual evaluation will be timely, relevant, and responsive.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▶ What: Focus of the Evaluation

◦ Organizations conduct many types of evaluations. Although literature has been dominated by a focus on program evaluation, it is not particularly useful to carve up evaluation approaches according to which activity is being evaluated.

◦ A more helpful distinction is to think of evaluation by contexts, processes, and impacts.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▸ What: Focus of the Evaluation
  ◦ Needs Assessments or Context Evaluation
    • Focuses on the characteristics of communities, stakeholders and broad social, economic and environmental factors.

    • Aims to assess the needs, assets, and resources of a target community and identify its political environment and human services context.

    • Allows voluntary organizations to plan relevant and effective interventions and increases the likelihood that they will be supported by community leaders and other organizations.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

- What: Focus of the Evaluation
  - Needs Assessments or Context Evaluation
    - Typically conducted prior to the beginning of a program

    - Not static – context assessments may be conducted in later phases as the project or program matures – usually when contextual information is required to modify plans, explain deviations, examine broad changes in society and may figure in the interpretation of results.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

- What: Focus of the Evaluation
  - Process Evaluation
    - Focuses on how the program actually works and can shed light on why certain results or outcomes are or are not achieved.

    - It is distinguished from formative evaluation by its focus, analysis of how things work rather than its timing. (May be part of a formative evaluation)

    - May take place while a program is still being implemented, providing indications of what is happening and why.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▶ What: Focus of the Evaluation
◦ Process Evaluation
  • Can also be a part of the summative evaluation, conducted once the program or project is completed.

  • Successful implementation of new project activities typically involves a process of adapting the ideal plan to local conditions, organizational dynamics and programmatic uncertainties.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▸ What: Focus of the Evaluation
  ◦ Process Evaluation can help to:
    • Identify and maximize strengths of the process and minimize barriers to implementing activities;

    • Determine the nature of interactions between staff and clients or users;

    • Measure the performance, perceptions and satisfaction of staff and volunteers, and the adequacy of organizational control and delivery systems;

    • Monitor users' and other stakeholders' experiences with the project and their satisfaction with and utilization of project services; and

    • Assess whether available resources can sustain project activities.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▶ What: Focus of the Evaluation
◦ Outcome Evaluation
• Assesses the short and long-term program results or impacts and seeks to understand what difference the program made.

• Three broad categories of outcomes are:

• Individual, User-Focused Outcomes – shows how individuals lives improve as a result of the program.

• Program and System-level Outcomes – illustrates what the program is trying to achieve for the broader system.

• Broader Family or Community Outcomes – takes individual-level outcomes to the next level in measuring the impact of families, neighborhoods and in some cases whole communities.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▸ What: Focus of the Evaluation
  ◦ Outcome Evaluation
    • A key challenge with outcome measurement is revealing the cause and effect.

    • The complex, multi-layered nature of programs and the dynamic character of relationships among people, systems, and communities often make it very difficult to ascertain the exact cause of and outcome.

    • Attribution requires a detailed analysis of cause-and-effect relationships, and even after such analysis, may encounter problems of timing as the actual outcomes may take years to realize; may be expensive and time consuming; and often programs produce unintended outcomes, which take extensive research to identify and measure.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

- What: Focus of the Evaluation
  - Outcome Evaluation
    - An exclusive focus on outcomes may lead to overlooking equally important aspects of evaluation, such as understanding how and why the program works or does not work, and what factors and circumstances shape the program.

Evaluation Issues:
The Meta-Questions

- What: Focus of the Evaluation
  - Logic Models is a means of linking contexts, processes and outcomes

  - Not to definitively prove that the program has made a difference but to build over time a convincing case of plausible association between the results observe and the activities an outputs of the program, as more and more evidence is gathered.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▸ What: Focus of the Evaluation
  ◦ Logic Models thus ties together:

  ◦ Context – the relevant physical, social, cultural or political circumstances in which a program or other activity is set;

  ◦ Inputs – the resources that are required to implement the program;

  ◦ Activities – the processes, tools, events, technology, and actions that are an intentional part of the program implementation;

  ◦ Outputs – the immediate products or consequences of program activities; and

  ◦ Outcomes – the actual changes that are realized when the outputs are used.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▸ What: Focus of the Evaluation

  ◦ An effective logic model is developed early, and continuously refined and changed throughout the program assessment process in order to reflect the changing nature of the environment and knowledge about what works and what does not.

Evaluation Issues:
The Meta-Questions

- Who: Choice of Evaluator and Participant Involvement
  - Are evaluations better conducted by internal or external evaluators?
    - Traditionally, evaluations are done by external experts in order to ensure the objectivity, impartiality and credibility of the findings.

    - In-going monitoring function is necessarily and in-house function and are primarily used to maximize learning and improve programs and operations.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▸ Who: Choice of Evaluator and Participant Involvement

◦ The decision of who should be involved does not stop with determining the evaluator.

◦ Participatory Evaluation requires collaboration of stakeholders in evaluation design, identification of indicators, data collection and interpretation, and use of results.

◦ The extent of involvement and collaboration can pose a number of challenges, however can prove highly beneficial to the process of performance management and communications.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

▶ How: Data Collection Methods and Sources of Information

◦ The collection of data and the methods chosen can be time consuming.

◦ The main factors that influence the choice of data collection methods, besides the intended use of the evaluation findings and nature of users, include:

- Accuracy, credibility, and sufficiency of data;
- Political sensitivity of collecting data;
- Complexity of collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data; and
- Costs of collecting data.

Evaluation Issues: The Meta-Questions

- How: Data Collection Methods and Sources of Information
  - The choice of how formal and elaborate a method to use should be made on the basis of how much time, money and skill an organization has, but more importantly on how much it needs large amounts of high quality, detailed information for making internal policy decisions or influencing important external stakeholders.

- Page 358 & 359 have a sample of data collection methods expressed in Table 2.

Using Evaluation for Organizational Learning

▸ The differences between an organization that can do good evaluation when needed and one that actually uses evaluation as a means of learning and self-improvement hinges on making effective **use of the results of the evaluation, dealing with the political dimensions, and developing the capacity for performance assessment.**

Using Evaluation for Organizational Learning

▸ Evaluation information can be a powerful tool for a variety of stakeholders. Several strategies can help promote the effective **use of the evaluation data:**

◦ Ensuring high quality of evaluation information;
◦ Presenting evaluation results as a systematic, cumulative study of links between activities and outcomes;
◦ Keeping specific audiences in mind in reporting evaluation results;
◦ Building stakeholder capacity to interpret, disseminate and maximize information;
◦ Using strategies that anticipate and reduce opposition; and
◦ Ensuring that data are used fairly.

Using Evaluation for Organizational Learning

▶ Evaluation is not an objective value-free process, but one that is inherently political.

◦ The **political dimensions of evaluation** may be manifest is several ways:

- Involves people with specific an different values, perceptions and interests and may interpret information in different ways;

- The politics may be conscious and intentional, in that there may be a structural dimension to politics as with funders when payment is provided only after achievement of certain results; or may be

- Internally driven, whereas, Boards, at times, fail in their governance roles related to performance assessment and in their fiduciary duties to hold management accountable.

Using Evaluation for Organizational Learning

▸ The biggest barrier to effective evaluation in Canada is not political rather lack of capacity.

  ◦ Major issues involved in helping communities and the sector as a whole participate and develop capacity for evaluation include:

    • Building credibility and acceptance of capacity-building efforts within communities;

    • Institutionalizing increased capacity;

    • Recognizing cultural competence and its impact on community engagement in research; and

    • Building local capacity for using and disseminating data.