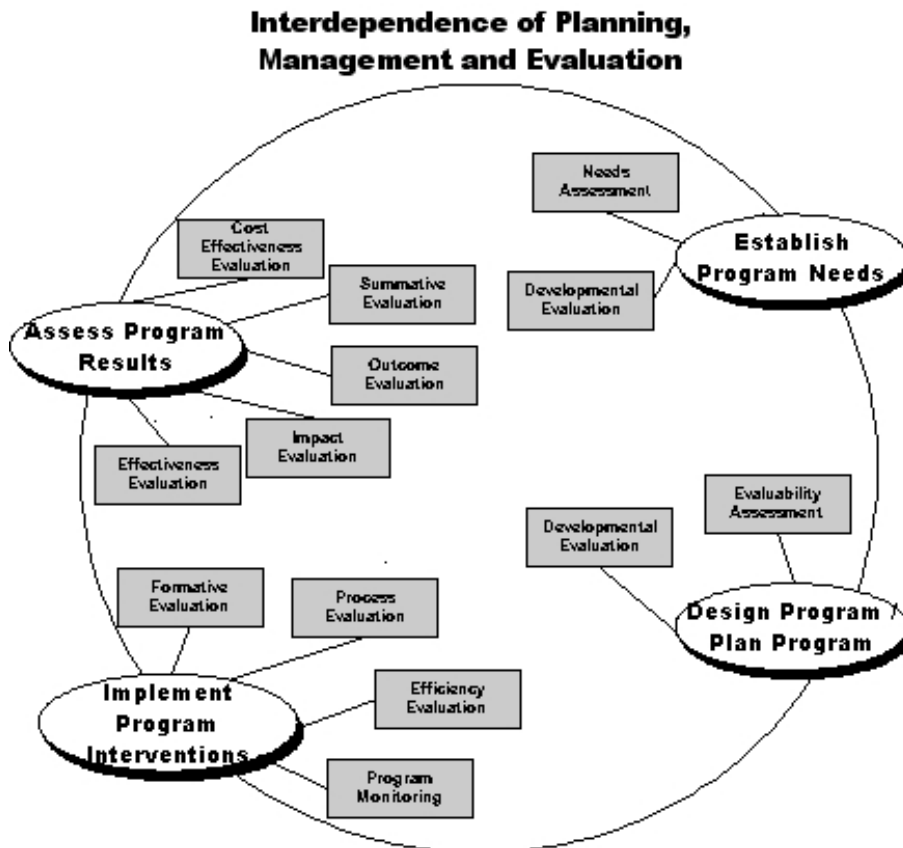


# Stages of an Evaluation

By OIPRC Staff

Evaluation isn't just something one does after a program is finished to determine whether it worked and should be funded for another year. The time to start [planning your evaluation](#) is while you're initially planning your program.

The accompanying figure demonstrates the role of evaluation at each stage of program planning and implementation.



\*From the Canadian Evaluation Society, "Understanding  
Program Evaluation",  
*Essential Skills Series Session 1*

## Establishing Program Needs

As can be seen, one should start thinking like an evaluator even before there is a program. A **Needs Assessment** should be conducted to determine what the real programming needs are in your community. This can save wasted time and effort by ensuring that your program activities are focused on important outcomes, and that resources will be matched appropriately to targets. Evaluation efforts that aim to develop an effective program are often collectively referred to as **Developmental Evaluation**.

## **Design Program / Plan Program**

During the design phase of program planning one can begin designing one's overall evaluation framework. The goal of an **Evaluability Assessment** is to make sure that a program is designed in such a way that its theory of action is understood, and that one could determine whether or not it was successful, and by what criteria.

## **Implement Program Interventions**

Once a program is running, it is important to monitor it. **Program Monitoring** can ensure that the program that is being implemented is the program that was designed, that it is running efficiently, and that it is meeting performance targets. **Process Evaluation** refers to all the activities that evaluate the operation of a program while running. **Efficiency Evaluation** refers more narrowly to focusing on questions of efficiency of program deliveries. The goal of evaluation at this stage is to improve the program operation. Accordingly, the whole process of evaluation thus far described is often collectively known as **Formative Evaluation**.

## **Assess Program Results**

Finally, one comes to the point of asking whether or not a program was successful. It is often this question that most people think of when they hear the word evaluation, though hopefully it is becoming clear that there is more to it than that. To distinguish it from asking questions of improving program performance, the process of asking about program effectiveness is often referred to as **Summative Evaluation**. Because evaluation at this stage is focused on the outcome of program performance it is also commonly called **Outcome Evaluation**, or if focused more narrowly on immediate outcomes, **Impact Evaluation**. There are numerous indicators one might use for program effectiveness (hence **Effectiveness Evaluation**), and some consensus about what they should be is an important part of planning your evaluation. It is vital that program delivery stakeholders be part of the process of determining what evaluations questions are to be asked, and what indicators are to be used in answering them.

One question often raised at this point, related to the question of efficiency of program delivery above, is whether or not the program outcomes were sufficient given the resources expended on program delivery. To this end **Cost-Effectiveness Evaluation** is becoming an increasingly common request.

## **An Ongoing Cycle**

While the above circle seems to suggest a simple, orderly progression, it's not always that easy. You may wish to evaluate a program that was developed years ago, and which never had an evaluability assessment done. You will thus want to develop a program description and a program logic model, even though the program has been in the implementation phase for a long time.