

MOMENTUM

Country and Global Leadership



Technical Brief

SUMMATIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION GUIDANCE

OBJECTIVE OF THE SUMMATIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION GUIDE

This document provides guidance to program managers, technical advisors, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning staff on how to select an approach for a summative evaluation. The approaches described here are complementary to and intended to be used less frequently than the monitoring approaches described in the [MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership Basic Toolkit for Adaptive Learning](#). These approaches may be used independently or be paired, adapted, or simplified to meet program needs.



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WHAT IS A SUMMATIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION?

It is an evaluation that aims to answer if, how, and/or why a program or intervention did or did not result in a change in a given context. There are two approach categories: theory-based and effectiveness/impact evaluation. These categories are not mutually exclusive; rather, evaluators may choose to implement a modified approach by pairing approaches from both categories for a mixed methods design.

THINKING THROUGH WHETHER A SUMMATIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION IS APPROPRIATE

If there are not sufficient time and resources to do an evaluation well, it may not be appropriate to conduct a formal internal evaluation. In this case, the donor may commission an external evaluation or may rely on performance monitoring and program learning to assess project success or inform decisions about future investments.

WHAT YOU NEED TO CONSIDER TO PREPARE FOR A SUMMATIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION

DEFINE THE PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The scope and purpose of a summative evaluation should address a clearly defined research question or aim to generate data to inform if or how an intervention should be scaled or strengthened. It should also reflect the available time and resources. The scope may focus on an entire program, a specific objective, or a singular intervention strategy. For all levels of scope, a well-thought-out theory of change should be a component of the evaluation plan.

SELECT AN APPROACH FOR THE EVALUATION

The approach should reflect stakeholder demand, be likely to produce useful findings and be appropriate given the available resources and skill sets.

DEVELOP A PLAN TO CARRY OUT THE EVALUATION

Evaluations should be formally planned, include discrete activities, and are ideally co-created with partners during development of the intervention plan to strategize for data collection, management, and supplemental resources. Steps in evaluation plan development are influenced by whether the study is classified as human subjects research. Preparing a concept note is a helpful method for outlining initial evaluation ideas and determining what types of approvals will be needed for implementation. Concept notes should be expanded into more detailed, costed evaluation plans, and be iteratively reviewed and refined over the course of the project.

SUMMATIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION APPROACHES

THEORY-BASED EVALUATION APPROACHES

They seek to explain why programs work, or not, and are used when the aim is to better understand the program outcomes or replicate programs elsewhere. Theory-based evaluations use an explicit theory of change to draw conclusions about whether and how an intervention contributed to observed results. Below are two examples of theory-based evaluation approaches.

Approach	Description	When to use	When not to use
Contribution Analysis	Aims to address the question “What role did the intervention play in bringing about the outcome?” by developing, reviewing, or refining a causal framework to elucidate how and why an intervention contributed to a change and other potential contributing factors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When interventions are based on a relatively clear/established theory of change. • When there is little variation in how a program is implemented across sites. • When there is a desire to articulate the project’s contribution to observed outcomes (and sole attribution is difficult). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the causal framework is weak or loosely defined. • When project implementation cannot be well documented. • When the program is of relatively short duration, or it is unlikely that implementation was of sufficient intensity or duration for notable change to occur.
Realist Evaluation	Aims to answer the question of “What works, for whom, to what extent, in what contexts, and how?” by examining how context affects the way people respond to resources provided by programs in a complex environment, and how this influences program implementation and outcomes. This is done by developing, testing, and refining a program theory in the form of “context-mechanism-outcome” configurations (hypothesis statements).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For evaluating new initiatives or programs that appear to work, but how, in what context(s), and among which sub-populations is not fully understood. • For evaluating programs that will be rolled out / scaled up to understand how to tailor the intervention to new contexts. • For evaluating programs that have previously demonstrated mixed patterns of outcomes, to understand how and why the differences occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When how, why, and where programs work is already well understood. • When there is no context or outcome data available. • When selected or potential evaluation team members lack experience with theory-based analysis. • When the program is of relatively short duration or project staff are unable to agree on an initial program theory.

EFFECTIVENESS/IMPACT EVALUATION APPROACHES

These types of evaluations measure the change in a development outcome that is attributable to a defined intervention. Impact evaluations are based on models of cause and effect and require a credible and rigorously defined counterfactual to control for factors other than the intervention that might account for the observed change.

Approach	Description	When to use	When not to use
Qualitative Complexity-Aware Evaluation Design	Aims to answer the questions “Is the evidence consistent with what would be expected if the intervention was producing the observed outcomes? Are there other factors that could provide an alternative explanation?” There are numerous qualitative complexity-aware evaluation techniques, including outcome harvesting and qualitative impact assessment protocol.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When there is an interest in assessing both intended and unanticipated outcomes. • When prospective data collection is not an option, and baseline data are not available. • When more traditional effectiveness / impact evaluation methods are not practical with the resources and time available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When there is interest in quantifying an outcome measurement. • There is only interest in whether a change occurred, but not about the how or why. • When there is not sufficient time and resources to engage with a variety of stakeholders. • When the evaluation team lacks familiarity or comfort with qualitative and complexity-aware evaluation methods.
Quasi-Experimental Design	Aims to establish causal attribution by comparing observed effects of a program or intervention to a counterfactual scenario, but do not involve random assignment of participants to intervention and comparison groups. Rather, the designs use statistical or judgment-based matching techniques to achieve equivalency between treatment and control groups. Examples include difference-in-differences and interrupted time series analyses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When there is an explicit demand to quantify intervention effectiveness in a controlled (experimental) or real-world (quasi-experimental) settings. • When evaluators are involved in design and implementation from the beginning of the project. • When there are resources to engage individuals or organizations with experience conducting experimental and quasi-experimental studies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the program or intervention will not have been implemented for long enough to observe anticipated outcomes. • Few United States Agency for International Development-funded global health programs will have the time and resources to conduct an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation. Select projects may expect to conduct this type of evaluation, but these “special studies” are typically highlighted in the initial project description, and resourced accordingly.
Experimental Design	Aims to establish causal attribution by developing an estimate of what would have happened in the absence of a program or intervention (a counterfactual scenario) and comparing this to observed effects of the program. This is done by randomly selecting individuals (randomized control trials) or groups of individuals (stepped-wedge and cluster randomized control trials) to receive either an intervention or control treatment.		

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