

Program Evaluation as Discernment of Truth

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Reflect on the experience of believers at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13). When the Holy Spirit came upon them they understood the truth about life and were able to communicate it to others in spite of language differences.

A general definition of program evaluation becomes more meaningful for transformational development ministry when this idea is applied to it. The Holy Spirit inspires evaluation that matters.

A general definition of program evaluation is:

The facilitation of informed judgments by stakeholders about the merit or worth of a program based on verifiable evidence.

A program stakeholder is any individual or group that is influenced by the presence of the program. In general evaluators focus on those stakeholders that are directly influenced. Examples include program participants, program managers and staff, sponsoring agency, implementing agency, various groups of officials in the setting where the program is being implemented, etc.

Examples of stakeholders that may be indirectly influenced are the managers and staff of other agencies that implement similar programs, training agencies, policy makers, etc.

Other key elements of the definition are:

- Facilitation
- Informed judgments
- Merit
- Worth
- Verifiable evidence

The following chart contrasts these elements from the perspective of the general definition and the perspective of a Christian evaluator guided by the Holy Spirit.

General Definition	Inspired Definition
<p>Evaluation is <u>facilitation</u>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The general meaning of facilitation is to do things that make it easier for someone to do something. • A more specialized meaning is to help someone explore something at a deeper level. The application for evaluation is to understand what is true and not true about claims made for a program. 	<p>Evaluation as Christian ministry is facilitation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It prepares the way for people to hear the truth about a program. What is truth? It is the Word of God regarding the program. Evaluation as ministry should reveal how the dynamics of sin and grace are at work in the program. • As truth is discovered evaluation encourages people to live by truth.
<p>The evaluator assists program stakeholders to make <u>informed judgments</u>.</p> <p>From a scientific perspective an informed judgment is consistent with empirical knowledge.</p>	<p>From a Christian perspective informed judgments are consistent with the Word of God or knowledge of the heart. They are expressed in language that is given by the Holy Spirit as the evaluator prays for guidance in interpreting data.</p>
<p>Judgments are made about the <u>merit</u> of a program where merit is the value of the program in terms of relevant knowledge and experience.</p> <p>A program that has merit is a program that is designed to apply relevant knowledge as effectively and efficiently as possible.</p>	<p>In World Vision ministry a program has merit if it is designed to increase love for God and neighbor regardless of the particular activities.</p>
<p>Judgments are also made about the <u>worth</u> of program.</p> <p>A program has worth when its outcomes are consistent with planned goals and objectives.</p>	<p>A program has worth, or it adds value to its context, if the actual outcomes of the program enhance love for God and neighbor.</p>
<p>Judgments are based on <u>verifiable evidence</u>. This is evidence that can be examined by someone else. Generally there are two types of evidence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicator readings show the numerical status of selected program qualities and outcomes. • Documented perspectives of key informants provide information on how people interpret the value of program qualities or outcomes. 	<p>Verifiable evidence regarding love for God and neighbor can be collected by rigorous application of various qualitative research techniques interwoven with Scripture study and focused prayer. Stories about change, with descriptions of emotions expressed in the telling of the stories, are especially valuable as evidence. Pairs of evaluators should collect this evidence so that tests of consistency in recording can be completed. (Audio or video recording introduces factors that can distort the content expressed during a story telling process.)</p>

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