

Impact Evaluation Unit Evaluation Policy¹

2023

Introduction

This evaluation policy outlines key principles that govern our planning, conduct, and use of evaluation. This policy demonstrates our commitment to conduct high-quality evaluations and use the resulting evidence to inform policy and practice. We seek to promote rigor, equity, relevance, independence, transparency, and ethics in each stage of our evaluations.

Minnesota Management and Budget's mission is to serve the people of Minnesota by providing the state with leadership and guidance to support efficient, effective, and equitable governance. The importance of these goals necessitates we support continual innovation and improvement of publicly-funded services. Through thoughtful research and evaluation, we can help make these services better.

Rigor

We are committed to using the most rigorous methods available given our research questions, budget, and other constraints. Rigor matters in all forms of evaluation, including qualitative and quantitative process, outcome, and impact evaluations. It requires ensuring that inferences about cause and effect are well founded (internal validity); developing clarity about the populations, settings, or circumstances to which results can be generalized (external validity); and requiring the use of measures that are reliable proxies for the outcomes they intend to assess (measurement reliability and validity).

To assess the effects of programs or services in a rigorous way, our evaluations use methods that isolate, to the greatest extent possible, the impacts from other influences, such as trends over time, geographic variation, or pre-existing differences between participants and non-participants. For causal questions, experimental approaches are preferred. When experimental approaches are not feasible, high-quality quasi-experiments often offer a strong alternative.

To promote rigor, we employ staff with varied lived experiences and academic training in a range of disciplines. We provide professional development opportunities so staff can keep their skills current. To expand our perspectives, we consult with a diverse group of national, state, and community experts.

Equity

Equity as a principle is the absence of individual or systemic disadvantages, unfairness, or harm that is predicated on real or perceived differences between groups of people. These groups may be defined socially, economically, demographically, or by other dimensions. Equity as a process is the creation and implementation of policies and practices that reduce or eliminate systems limiting fairness and justice.

In support of both, we recognize in our evaluations that history, culture, and social structures mean a program has different impacts for different communities. We seek community partners that can help us design an evaluation that accurately reflects how the current conditions came to be, and what may be done to promote a more effective and just future. Wherever possible and in consultation with community partners, we use evaluation

¹ This evaluation policy draws extensively from the [evaluation policy](#) published by the federal Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in November 2021 (explained in this [short video](#)). We thank ACF for their leadership on this topic.

methods that allow us to estimate impacts and disaggregate data by sociodemographic groups, such as race, sex, and geography.

Relevance

Evaluation priorities should reflect the interests, needs, and sensitivities of the populations served; legislators and other state leaders; partners such as other state agencies, Tribal Nations, local governments, and grantees; researchers; and other stakeholders. There should be strong partnerships amongst researchers, decision-makers, program providers, and community representatives. These stakeholders should have the opportunity participate in designing evaluation questions and identifying outcome measures. For new initiatives, evaluations are more useful when planned with stakeholders from the outset of the initiative.

We integrate both the use of existing evidence and opportunities for further learning into all our activities. Where prior evidence exists, we use it. Where an evidence base is lacking, we seek to build evidence. The emphasis on evidence is to facilitate—not inhibit—innovation, learning, and progress.

We disseminate findings in ways that are accessible and useful to policymakers, practitioners, and providers. We strive to provide this information at the right time, place, and format to facilitate use.

Independence

Agency and program leadership, program staff, service providers, and others should participate actively in setting evaluation priorities, identifying evaluation questions, and assessing the implications of findings. However, it is important to insulate evaluations from any undue influence. To assess programs as objectively as possible, we protect independence in the design, conduct, and analysis of evaluations. To this end, our team has authority to approve the design of evaluation projects and to publish evaluation findings.

Transparency

To promote accessibility and replicability, we pre-register evaluation hypotheses, analysis plans, and limitations in advance via [Open Science Framework \(OSF\)](#). We release evaluation results regardless of the findings. Final evaluation reports describe the methods used, including strengths and limitations, and discuss the generalizability of the findings. These reports present comprehensive results, including favorable, unfavorable, and null findings. We publish all results in a timely manner.

Ethics

We conduct high-quality evaluations that safeguard the dignity, rights, safety, and privacy of participants and their data. We work to uphold the [Belmont Report](#) principles of respect for persons (protecting participant autonomy), beneficence (minimizing participant risks and maximizing benefits), and justice (fair distribution of any risks and benefits in participating in the study). We seek Institutional Review Board approval for evaluations classified as Human Subjects Research, uphold the spirit and the letter of relevant law and regulations, and adhere to professional guidelines, such as the American Evaluation Association's [Ethical Guiding Principles](#).