

Frequently Asked Questions of Program Evaluation Consultants

1. What is evaluation?

If you ask five evaluators what evaluation is, you will get five different answers. However, all will include a variety of key factors. Program evaluation was born out of a need to understand a program's efficacy, specifically in education. It is also related to monitoring, which ensures a program is implemented as designed or expected but goes further with an intentional focus on improvement. So, where does this leave us? I believe **Evaluation is an intentional and systematic approach to designing, implementing, and using strategies to learn about a program with the aim of improving.** It may involve surveys, logic models, focus groups, pre- and post-tests, spreadsheets of demographic information, or reports sharing impacts.

2. Do I need a logic model (LM) or theory of change (ToC)?

First, let's define these two. Logic models are a (mostly) linear expression of how (1) what we are putting into the program (ingredients) and (2) what we do in the program (putting the cake in the oven) generate our end result (hopefully a cake). It is based on research and logic. Theories of change, on the other hand, speak to the broader view of the baking process. The theory of change includes the context of things that may influence our change (ingredients to cake), such as altitude, quality of ingredients, or even who is doing the baking. It is often represented highly visually and is less linear (i.e., it appears to be messy). So, do you need one or both?

Yes, probably, but not always. I know some will disagree with me here. Many evaluators say that these documents are a foundational building block and must be written and revised consistently and that all evaluation activities should be tied back to this. And, for some situations, absolutely. But, I believe it is more important for your organization or team to have tools that represent your program and that make sense to you. Often, logic models and theories of change become an academic process and lose touch with our real-world context. If this happens, it's a distraction and not a resource.

3. How much of our budget should be allocated to evaluation?

Five to fifteen percent of the program's budget. That is my "zero-context-of-your-work" answer. If your program is just starting out, probably a bit more. If your program has been running for ten years consistently, likely less. If you are getting funding from a state or federal source, 15 percent is a common earmark. There are a few national surveys that help illuminate norms based on the size and scope of your organization. [Page 5 is a great snapshot.](#)

4. Where do I even start?

You already have. You've started to ask questions and learn answers if you've made it here. The next steps could include asking internally about existing, previous, or current evaluation activities. You may also look at your strategic plan and funders' requirements for guidance on the next steps. Finally, most evaluation consultants will provide a free consultation to help brainstorm and answer questions. Many evaluation consultants will listen and take notes and be willing to prepare a proposal with tasks and budgets. If you are looking for someone regionally, check out [eval.org](#) and search your city/state or ask your nonprofit peers for recommendations. Or, shoot Brad an email at Brad@bkruegerconsulting.com.