

## Evaluation FAQs

### 1. What is evaluation?

If you ask 5 evaluators what evaluation is, you will get 5 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 has grown to include a wider approach to systematically planning, tracking, reflecting, and revising. It is related to monitoring, which ensures a program is implemented as designed or expected but goes further with intentional focus on improvement. It is not about assigning value. It is about purposefully learning through program data. So, where does this leave us? **Evaluation is an intentional and systematic approach to planning and implementing strategies to learn about a program with the aim of improving.** It may look like surveys, logic models, focus groups, pre/post tests, spreadsheets of demographic information, or reports sharing impacts.

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

Sure, yes, maybe. First, let's define these two. Logic models are a linear (mostly) expression of how what we are putting into the program (ingredients) and what we do in the program (putting the cake in the oven) generate our end result (hopefully a funfetti 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 baking 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 (aka, it appears to be messy). So, do you need one or both?

Yes, probably. I know some will disagree with me here. Many evaluators will say this is a foundation building block and must be written and revised consistently and 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 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?

10%-20%. 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 10 years consistently, likely less. If you are getting funding from a state or federal source, 15% is a common earmark. If you are all donor or foundation funded, often this is less. There are a few national surveys that help illuminate 'norms' based on size and scope of your organization, but The [Pew Charitable Trust](#) does a good job framing what drives evaluation cost.

### 4. Where do I even start?

You already have. You've started to ask questions and learn if you've made it here. Next steps could include asking internally about existing, previous or current evaluation activities. You may also look at your strategic plan and funder's requirements for guidance on 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](mailto:Brad@bkruegerconsulting.com)