

Chapter 2. An Overview of the Program Evaluation Process

What's **Inside?** _____



What this chapter contains

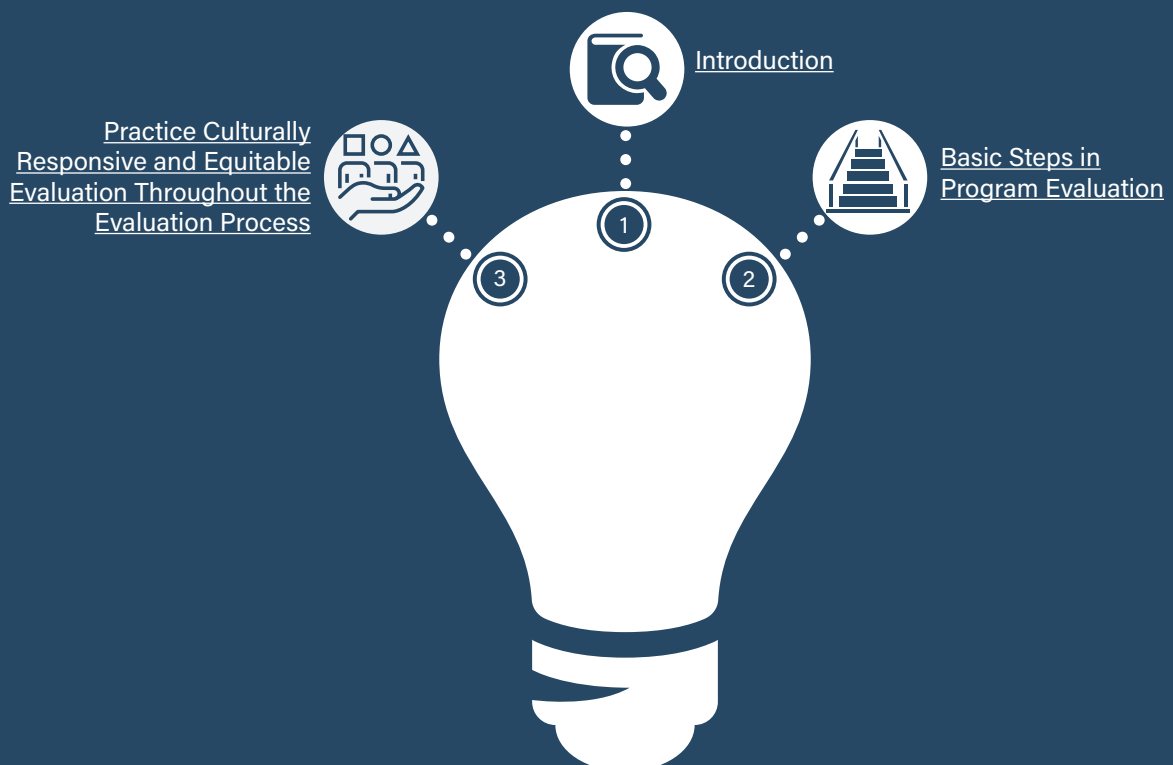
- An overview of six common steps to conducting a program evaluation
- An introduction to culturally responsive and equitable evaluation



Who can use this chapter

- Program managers who are new to program evaluation and seeking a better understanding of how to plan and conduct evaluations equitably

Click the links below to view the relevant section



Introduction

To achieve a well-designed and well-executed program evaluation, planning is critical. This chapter lays out a six-step process, or framework, to help support your evaluation planning. These steps are adapted from CDC's Framework for Program Evaluation (1999), a practical, nonprescriptive tool that will help you summarize and organize the essential components of your evaluation. This framework is just one of several tools available to guide you through the evaluation process and support planning. Some frameworks are tailored to programs targeting specific behaviors, conditions, or populations. Others—including the CDC framework—apply across a range of settings.

This chapter introduces a central theme of the Guide: applying a culturally responsive and equity-focused approach to the design, implementation, and management of evaluation will improve its quality and utility (Inouye et al., 2005). A culturally responsive and equitable approach is one that is multiculturally valid¹; values the voices, knowledge, and expertise of systemically minoritized and underrepresented groups; and aligns evaluation objectives to address equity (Dean-Coffey, 2018). The remaining chapters of the Guide are organized around the six steps, offering you an in-depth look at important decisions you will encounter at each stage and practical recommendations for adapting your evaluation to your program's unique context.

Basic Steps in Program Evaluation

This section summarizes common activities you may conduct during each stage of an evaluation. Although presented in sequential order, all six steps are interrelated and overlap, and they may be iterative. Often the first three occur at the same time and provide a foundation for the last three. At each step, you should tailor the evaluation to your program's unique needs and continuously seek alignment with shifting priorities:

Step 1

Engage an evaluation team

- Define the roles and responsibilities of individuals on your evaluation team.
- Identify individuals, organizations, and/or communities interested in or affected by your evaluation (e.g., representatives from your service community).
- Decide whether an internal or external evaluator better suits your program's needs.
- When applicable, select and hire an external evaluator.

Step 2

Prepare for the evaluation

- Cultivate opportunities to engage community representatives in meaningful participation.
- Carefully consider all relevant factors when determining the size and scope of your evaluation.

¹Multiculturally valid refers to a measure or technique that is accurate or authentic across cultural differences (Fey, 2018).

- Bring together an evaluation team that includes evaluation subject matter experts, program staff, program managers, and other important perspectives such as those of community members.
- Build and use a logic model.
- State implementation and/or outcome objectives in measurable terms.
- Prepare an evaluation budget.
- Plan to communicate lessons learned and your evaluation findings.

Step 3

Focus the evaluation designs

- Choose appropriate designs and methodological approaches for your evaluation.
- Seek community input and collaboration on your evaluation design.
- Develop a method to select participants and collect data from members of your target population who will represent the whole group.
- Establish clear procedures for managing and monitoring the evaluation.
- Ensure the safety, respect, and privacy of all evaluation participants.
- Safeguard the confidentiality of data and data sources.

Step 4

Gather credible evidence

- Identify data sources that provide accurate information.
- Select or construct measures to capture all the information you need for the evaluation.
- Build and test data collection instruments that systematically and thoroughly capture the information you need to answer your evaluation questions.
- Ensure measures and instruments are culturally appropriate and reflect community member perspectives.
- Develop data collection procedures that promote consistency.
- Monitor the quality of data collected periodically.

Step 5

Analyze data

- Prepare your data for analysis and assess its initial quality.
- Use appropriate data analysis methods.
- Share provisional interpretations of results with program staff and community members and solicit feedback.

- Interpret your findings to develop an understanding of your results.
- Limit conclusions to the situations, time periods, persons, contexts, and purposes where they are applicable.

Step 6

Share lessons learned

- Communicate lessons learned, following your communication plan, to relevant audiences including community members.
- Ensure results are communicated in ways that are transparent and accessible and that facilitate the use of evidence to make programmatic decisions.
- Adapt content and language of evaluation products for different audiences.
- Identify actions or decisions consistent with your evaluation's conclusions.

Practice Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation Throughout the Evaluation Process

In an environment of equity,² all people, regardless of factors such as income, identity, or skin color, would live in thriving communities with access to the resources and opportunities to live healthy, happy lives. Equity is in place when everyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from, has the opportunity to thrive (Expanding the Bench, 2022). Taking a culturally responsive and equitable approach to program evaluation means rethinking how evaluation design, implementation, and the sharing of findings are related to equity. Organizations such as the Equitable Evaluation Initiative, the Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment, and We All Count have developed approaches to help researchers develop culturally responsive and equitable evaluation (CREE) frameworks.

Using a CREE approach in your evaluation can help incorporate cultural, structural, and contextual factors (e.g., historical, social, economic, racial, ethnic, gender) through a participatory process.³ Such an approach shifts power towards the individuals who are most strongly affected by the evaluation (Expanding the Bench, 2022). CREE is not just one method of evaluation; it is an approach that can be infused into all evaluation methodologies. CREE advances equity by informing strategy, program improvement, decision-making, policy formation, and change.

To date, much of the information about programs and their effectiveness has been generated by educated, higher income, predominately White evaluators using conventional evaluation approaches. Evaluators

² Equity is apparent when everyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from, has the opportunity to thrive. Equity requires acknowledging root causes of inequities, eliminating barriers, elevating community strengths, and relentlessly pursuing justice (Expanding the Bench, n.d.).

³ Participatory processes are specific methods employed to achieve active participation by all members of a group in a decision-making process. The approach shifts power to individuals most impacted by evaluation (Expanding the Bench, 2022).

should practice reflexivity to understand how they bring their experiences, values, and assumptions to their evaluation work. Doing so can help mitigate implied or explicit assumptions that White is the normative, standard, or default position, assumptions which can reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate disparities.

Reflexivity is one way to approach evaluation with cultural humility⁴ to address power imbalances and develop mutually beneficial and nonpaternalistic partnerships with communities. Cultural humility requires an understanding that people are experts of their own culture and experiences. Evaluators who analyze data, measure outcomes, and make recommendations for programs and systems have the responsibility to examine the role of power, privilege, and oppression in their work and actively avoid contributing to systemic inequality or sociodemographic disparities.

Beyond the internal reflection of evaluators, evaluation practices should routinely explore the context of programs and how to incorporate the voices of individuals potentially affected by the program. As CREE approaches become more common, new resources have emerged to support evaluators (see additional resources at the end of the chapter). One resource is CDC's guide, *Practical Strategies for Culturally Competent Evaluation* (2014). This resource highlights opportunities for program staff and evaluators to integrate equitable practices throughout the evaluation process. This Guide applies examples of CREE-based solutions to address conventional evaluation approaches from CDC as follows.

Step 1

Engage an evaluation team

- Conventional approach: The input and participation of community representatives may be undervalued and overlooked throughout the evaluation process.
- CREE solution: Engage community representatives in meaningful roles throughout the evaluation, including determining evaluation questions, testing data collection instruments, interpreting findings, and developing communication plans.

Step 2

Prepare for the evaluation

- Conventional approach: Program descriptions (e.g., logic models) can draw on deficit-based perspectives, which focus on individual and cultural factors viewed as “deficiencies” while disregarding the larger historical and sociopolitical contexts that perpetuate challenges for historically oppressed populations.
- CREE solution: During the development of an evaluation plan, adopt a strengths-based, community-driven approach to clarify community members’ perspectives and affirm what is known about the historical and social context of the program.

⁴ Cultural humility is a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique, to redressing power imbalances, and to developing mutually beneficial and nonpaternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations (Greene-Moton & Minkler, 2020).

Step 3

Focus the evaluation design

- Conventional approach: Evaluation questions can overlook what potential users of the evaluation findings seek to learn about a program. The choice of design and methods may not align with the needs of those engaged in the evaluation or those with strategic interests in the evaluation.
- CREE solution: Partner with community members during all stages of the research process to ensure the evaluation addresses the needs of the community and potential users of the program.

What is reflexivity?

Developing cultural humility as an evaluator is an individual, personal, and lifelong journey requiring reflexivity. Reflexivity involves questioning and exploring your underlying values, assumptions, and beliefs that influence the evaluation process:

- Reflection on your own cultural position
- Consideration for the wider and political context
- Intentional efforts to gain perspective of those whose backgrounds differ from one's own

For details on how to strengthen an evaluation team's capacity to operate reflexively, see Attia and Edge (2017).

Step 4

Gather credible evidence

- Conventional approach: Evaluation instruments do not always undergo the necessary testing to ensure they accurately and reliably measure what they are intended to measure when used in culturally specific contexts.
- CREE solution: When selecting measures, assess available options for cultural bias in language and content. Be sure you collect numerous perspectives on what and how the evaluation should measure so you collect data that addresses different groups' understanding of credible evidence (e.g., funders, the evaluation field, the communities that participate in the program under evaluation).

Step 5

Analyze data

- Conventional approach: Cultural humility is not always demonstrated when interpreting findings. Failing to recognize how your own beliefs, values, biases, and social position can influence how information is seen, heard, and interpreted increases the likelihood of holding a self-focused rather than other-oriented interpersonal stance (Hook et al., 2013).
- CREE solution: Collaborate with community members to uncover your assumptions and engage in reflexive practices that support examination of evaluator backgrounds, beliefs, or biases.

Step 6

Share lessons learned

- Conventional approach: Evaluation teams do not effectively communicate knowledge gained from an evaluation with people outside the team.
- CREE solution: Work closely with community members to develop a communication plan that aligns with their needs and emphasizes community benefit, positive change, and social justice.

Each subsequent chapter in this Guide concludes with a section titled “Practice Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation.” Refer to these sections for clear, actionable guidance on applying CREE practices during that stage of your evaluation.

To learn more ...

- [A Guide to Incorporating a Racial and Ethnic Equity Perspective Throughout the Research Process](#) (Andrews et al., 2019a)
- [Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment](#) (University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign, n.d.)
- [Considerations for Conducting Evaluation Using a Culturally Responsive and Racial Equity Lens](#) (Public Policy Associates, 2015a)
- [Equitable Evaluation Framework](#) (Equitable Evaluation Initiative, n.d.)
- [Equity as a Perspective for Implementation Research in Early Childhood](#) (Nores, 2020)
- [Evaluating Health Promotion Programs: Introductory Workbook](#) (Snelling & Meserve, 2016)
- [Guiding Principles for Evaluators](#) (American Evaluation Association, n.d.)
- [How to Design and Manage Equity-Focused Evaluations](#) (Bamberger & Segone, 2011)
- [How to Embed a Racial and Ethnic Equity Perspective in Research](#) (Andrews et al., 2019b)
- [Is My Evaluation Culturally Responsive?](#) (Public Policy Associates, 2015b)
- [Key Considerations for Managing Evaluations](#) (Sonko et al., 2011)
- [Materials and Resources Based on CDC’s Program Evaluation Framework](#) (CDC, 1999)
- [RE-AIM Framework](#) (RE-AIM, n.d.)
- [Reflections on Applying Principles of Equitable Evaluation](#) (Stern et al., 2019)
- [Using a Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation Approach to Guide Research and Evaluation](#) (Woodson, 2021)
- [Utilization-Focused Evaluation Checklist](#) (Patton, 2013)
- [We All Count](#) (We All Count, n.d.)
- [WHO Evaluation Practice Handbook](#) (World Health Organization, 2013)

References

- American Evaluation Association. (n.d.). *Guiding principles for evaluators*. <https://www.eval.org/About/Guiding-Principles>
- Andrews, J., Parekh, J., & Peckoo, S. (2019a). A guide to incorporating a racial and ethnic equity perspective throughout the research process. *Child Trends*. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/a-guide-to-incorporating-a-racial-and-ethnic-equity-perspective-throughout-the-research-process>
- Andrews, J., Parekh, J., & Peckoo, S. (2019b). How to embed a racial and ethnic equity perspective in research. *Child Trends*. https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/RacialEthnicEquityPerspective_ChildTrends_October2019.pdf
- Attia, M., & Edge, J. (2017). Be(com)ing a reflexive researcher: A developmental approach to research methodology. *Open Review of Educational Research*, 4(1), 33–45. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2017.1300068>
- Bamberger, M., & Segone, M. (2011). *How to design and manage equity-focused evaluations*. UNICEF. https://evalpartners.org/sites/default/files/EWP5_Equity_focused_evaluations.pdf
- CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). (1999). Framework for program evaluation in public health. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 48, No. RR-11. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/rr/rr4811.pdf>
- CDC. (2014). *Practical strategies for culturally competent evaluation*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/docs/cultural_competence_guide.pdf
- Dean-Coffey, J. (2018). What's race got to do with it? Equity and philanthropic evaluation practice. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 39(4), 527–542. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214018778533>
- Equitable Evaluation Initiative. (n.d.). *Equitable evaluation framework*. <https://www.equitableeval.org/framework>
- Expanding the Bench. (2022). *Spreading knowledge of CREE*. <https://expandingthebench.org/about/terms/>
- Fey, B. B. (2018). Multicultural validity. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation*. <https://methods.sagepub.com/reference/the-sage-encyclopedia-of-educational-research-measurement-and-evaluation/i14024.xml>
- Greene-Moton, E., & Minkler, M. (2020). Cultural competence or cultural humility? Moving beyond the debate. *Health Promotion Practice*, 21(1). <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1524839919884912>
- Hook, J., Davis, D., Owen, J., Worthington, E. L., & Utsey, S. O. (2013). Cultural humility: Measuring openness to culturally diverse clients. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 60(3). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236641214_Cultural_Humility_Measuring_Openness_to_Culturally_Diverse_Clients

- Inouye, T., Yu. H., & Adefuin, J. (2005). *Commissioning multicultural evaluation: A foundation research guide*. The California Endowment in partnership with Social Policy Research Associates. http://leadershiplearning.org/system/files/multicult_eval_rpt.pdf
- Nores, M. (2020). *Equity as a perspective for implementation research in the early childhood field*. National Institute for Early Childhood Research. Section 3, Chapter 12. https://www.fcd-us.org/assets/2020/06/GettingitRight_UsingImplementationResearchtoImproveOutcomesinECE_Chapter12_2020.pdf
- Patton, M. Q. (2013). *Utilization-focused evaluation (U-FE) checklist*. The Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University. https://wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/u350/2014/UFE_checklist_2013.pdf
- Public Policy Associates. (2015a). *Considerations for conducting evaluation using a culturally responsive and racial equity lens*. <https://publicpolicy.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/PPA-Culturally-Responsive-Lens.pdf>
- Public Policy Associates. (2015b). *Is my evaluation practice culturally responsive?* http://jordaninstituteforfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Self-Assessment_6-pages.pdf
- RE-AIM. (n.d.). *Checklist for inclusion of RE-AIM issues by RE-AIM dimension*. <https://re-aim.org/learn/checklist-for-inclusion-of-re-aim-issues-by-re-aim-dimension/>
- Snelling, S., & Meserve, A. (2016). *Evaluating health promotion programs: Introductory workbook*. Public Health Ontario. <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/e/2016/evaluating-hp-programs-workbook.pdf?la=en>
- Sonko, R., Berhanu, A., & Shamu, R. (2011). *Key considerations for managing evaluations (brief reference guide)*. <https://www.betterevaluation.org/sites/default/files/Key%20Considerations%20for%20Managing%20Evaluations.pdf>
- Stern, A., Guckenburg, S., Persson, H., & Petrosino, A. (2019). *Reflections on applying principles of equitable evaluation*. WestEd Justice & Prevention Research Center. <https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/resource-reflections-on-applying-principles-of-equitable-evaluation.pdf>
- University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. (n.d.). *CREA, Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment*. <https://crea.education.illinois.edu/>
- We All Count. (n.d.). *The project pieces. We All Count project for equity in data science*. <https://weallcount.com/about-us/>
- Woodson, T. T. (2021). *Using a culturally responsive and equitable evaluation approach to guide research and evaluation*. Mathematica. <https://www.mathematica.org/publications/using-a-culturally-responsive-and-equitable-evaluation-approach-to-guide-research-and-evaluation>
- World Health Organization. (2013). *WHO evaluation practice handbook*. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/96311/9789241548687_eng.pdf;jsessionid=20F23B46EFD93A44A7EFECDA4217405B?sequence=1