**Program Evaluation**

Evaluation is the systematic investigation of the merit, worth or significance of an object or effort.[[1]](#footnote-1) A description of all the types and uses of program evaluation is beyond the scope of this report. We will briefly review summative and formative evaluations as they relate to sustainability. Summative evaluations are typically retrospective assessments of established programs and are useful in determining accountability for successes and failures, informing consumers about quality and helping stakeholders (likely funders) to understand the effectiveness of a program or project. They provide cumulative statements of a program’s worth, including effectiveness and cost savings. Summative evaluations are not aimed for program development of staff, but rather sponsors and consumers. Formative evaluations, on the other hand, provide information for the development and/or improvement of a program. They offer guidance for those who are responsible for ensuring and improving the quality of a program, paying close attention to the needs of the consumer. Both formative and summative evaluations are necessary for program development and evaluation.

The timing of summative evaluation findings is often too late in the project life cycle to be useful in promoting sustainability; evaluation could be more useful if it included continuously accumulated data about major outcomes, so that interim data about outcomes would be available before the initial funding ends.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Key components include:

* The program has the capacity for quality program evaluation.
* The program reports short term and intermediate outcomes.
* Evaluation results inform program planning and implementation.
* The program provides strong evidence that the program works.
* Program evaluation results are used to demonstrate success to funders and other key stakeholders.

1. Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. *The program evaluation standards.* 1994,Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Scheirer MA. Is sustainability possible?: A review and commentary on empirical studies of program sustainability. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 2005,26, 320-347. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)