

Fact Sheet on Impact Evaluation

What is an impact evaluation?

An impact evaluation estimates the effects of a particular program.

How is this different from monitoring and evaluation?

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) usually refers to non-causal evaluation, whereas impact evaluation specifically refers to evaluation that can attribute a particular effect to the program itself.

What's the difference? Suppose one observes that after a program provided school meals, test scores rose. This would be observable through monitoring and evaluation. However, if one does not know what would have happened to test scores in the absence of the program – the counterfactual – one cannot say that test scores rose *because of the program*. Perhaps test scores would have risen for everyone, regardless of whether they or their class received school meals. Impact evaluation allows one to say whether a program itself was responsible for an observed outcome.

How can impact evaluation be seamlessly incorporated into my program?

There are several easy ways to incorporate impact evaluation into a program.

For example, perhaps your organization has limited resources and can only provide a program to some of the people it would like to target. In these situations, a lottery is often regarded as a fair way of determining who receives the benefits of the program. If one were to randomize who received the program and follow up with both groups later, one could directly attribute any progress made to the program.

Or perhaps rather than randomizing who receives the program, your organization decides to implement some set of criteria to determine who receives the program. Then we can look at the outcomes of the people who just barely qualified for the program and compare them to the outcomes of the people who just barely didn't qualify for the program. Again, by following up with both those who did and those who didn't receive the program, we can construct a counterfactual group which lets us attribute any changes to the program itself rather than the environment.

These are just two easy ways an impact evaluation can be carried out. There are other ways to structure an impact evaluation, as well. Please get in touch to discuss your unique situation and whether an impact evaluation would be right for you. We are not charging any fees until we grow to be a larger organization, so this is the perfect time to sign up.