Evaluation as a Planning and Management Tool*

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Evaluation is for making things work. If it works, notice and nurture. If it does not work, notice and change.

Anon.

Community planning consists of four elements: problem definition, program design, monitoring, and evaluation. In the problem definition phase, we identify community needs and assess the scope of those needs. The program design phase consists of building the appropriate planning structure, formulating specific policies, and implementing plans to respond to those needs. Monitoring provides feedback data and specifies mid-course corrections. The final phase is the focus of this article—systematic evaluation.¹

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¹ In this article, the focus of an evaluation may be an agency, program, or policy. We have used the terms interchangeably. Although procedures differ slightly based on what is being evaluated, our analysis is generic—identifying what is central to most systematic evaluations. An overview of the four community planning elements is contained in Robert Perlman and Arnold Gurin, Community Organization and Social Planning. New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1972; Alfred J. Kahn, Theory and Practice of Social Planning. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1969; and Harry A. Schatz, Social Work Administration: A Resource Book. New York: Council on Social Work Education, 1970.

In this article, we will analyze how evaluation differs from other forms of inquiry; why agencies and programs should be evaluated; whether an agency is ready; types of evaluations; the political framework; and a successful case study. Although the literature on this subject is constantly expanding, several concepts are important to the evaluation enterprise. The reader may therefore find the "Glossary of Key Evaluation Concepts," which appears at the end of this article, helpful in interpreting evaluation literature.

Definition and History

Evaluation research is a systematic investigation which utilizes standard social research methods. It assesses program/policy/agency design, implementation, and impact. Evaluations concentrate on social interventions—programs set up to alleviate deficiencies in human and social conditions. It is a big business. The Federal Government allocates between \$500 million and \$1 billion annually for program evaluations. Many organizations spend 5 to 10 percent of their budgets for planning and evaluation.

Although the field began in the 1930's, when efforts were made to evaluate President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs, it took off immediately following World War II. National and international expenditures for social welfare became huge, and there was a cry for "knowledge of results." For example, large-scale evaluations of public housing projects dealt with the con-

duct of residents. Typical research questions included: "Do slums make slum people or do slum people make the slums? Will changing the living conditions significantly change the social behavior of the people affected?" Today, we might have a comparable question about infant day care: "Are children who attend a well managed Jewish community center nursery school program psychologically better developed and more ready for school when compared to similar children reared at home?" 3

Recent elections in the United States have been seen by some as a mandate to curtail or rearrange human services. The electorate wants more scrutiny of current programs and the abolition of those which are ineffective or inefficient. In such a climate, evaluations may be justified as insurance against waste.

Why Should Jewish Communal Agencies and Programs Be Evaluated? Is Our Agency Ready?

During the 1970s, agencies were forced to become more accountable. In the 1980s, many agencies are fighting

² A. Stephen Stephan, "Prospects and Possibilities: The New Deal and the New Social Research," *Social Forces*. University of North Carolina Press. Volume 13 (May, 1935); pp. 515–521. The quotation is on p. 518.

for economic survival. Systematic evaluation enhances the credibility of programs to our financial supporters, helps agencies improve service delivery and become more responsive to the community. Line workers, supervisors, and board members care differently about the results of program evaluations. Figure 1 is a vehicle to help sort out these different agendas.

As Figure 1 demonstrates, evaluations serve various purposes. They determine the utility of ongoing projects; determine the effects of efforts to improve them; estimate the impact of new initiatives; upgrade the quality of agency administration; and compare an intervention's costs and benefits relative to other alternatives. It is assumed that competent workers and managers have a fairly reliable idea of how well things are going. An evaluation is not an attempt to second-guess agency professionals. Rather, it is an attempt to reduce uncertainty, to fill in gaps in our understanding about how well an organization is operating.

The attention of our research may be on inputs or preferably outputs. The input measure in Figure 1 is "effort" = the investment of staff, time, and resources in an activity. Examples include the number of participants in a Jewish vocational service job clinic or the number of contacts between a social worker and chavurot. Outputs refer to effectiveness and efficiency. "Effectiveness" deals with results, client outcomes. Has the bureau of Jewish education summer ulpan produced a Hebraically literate group of participants? The "efficiency" component speaks to controlling and reducing personnel, time, money, or physical plant. Should Jewish Big Brothers do group or individual counseling? Are Jewish community centers and synagogues duplicating after-school activities? If so, how can this be minimized? The distinction between

³ Jerome Kagan, Richard B. Kearsley, and Philip R. Zelazo, "The Effects of Infant Care on Psychological Development." Evaluation Quarterly: A Journal of Applied Social Research. Sage Publications. Volume 1, Number 1 (February, 1977), pp. 109-142, is a model study. It was a longitudinal investigation which assessed the psychological impact of an experimentally conducted day care program for children aged 3.5 to 29 months. The study revealed little difference between children reared totally at home and matched with the experimental children. Cognitive functioning, language, attachment, separation protest, and play tempo were measured. The home environment was more influential than day care in influencing each child's development.

Figure 1 Checklist of Reasons for Conducting Program Evaluations

Place a check mark next to each issue that is of concern to workers, supervisors, and board members. Then rank order, with "1" being the highest rank, the top three issues of concern to each group.

		WHO CARES	MOST?
Selected Issues	Workers	Supervisors	Board Members
1. Are the needs of the clients being met? (B)*			
2. Are there sufficient resources to meet program objectives? (A)			
3. Is the program too expensive? (C)			
4. Should the program be expanded or curtailed? (A)		******	
5. Is the service or treatment provided really effective?			
(B)			
6. Are budget decisions about the future based on pro-			
gram evaluation data? (C)			
7. Are we making best use of staff energy? (A)			
8. Can evaluation data be used to compare program			
costs? (C)			
9. What is the effectiveness of staff? (B)			
10. What is the level of client satisfaction? (B)			

* A = Effort; B = Effectiveness; C = Efficiency.

Note: Figures 1 and 2 are modifications of Michael J. Austin and Associates, Evaluating Your Agency's Programs. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982, pp. 11, 30.

types of outputs has been characterized by Peter Drucker, "Efficiency is doing things right. Effectiveness is doing the right things."

An agency should only be evaluated if it is ready—ready to learn and able to use what is learned. Technically qualified personnel are required to do the evaluation. Administrators and lay leaders who value the evaluation process and results must be in place. Among the factors to take into account in determining an agency's evaluation preparedness are funds, time, morale, and staff capability.

Financial resources, staff, and board time are needed in this process. If an outside consultant is hired, he/she must understand the nature of Jewish communal organizations and be expert in voluntary service delivery systems. Estimates of time and money should be made at the outset. For example, one recently completed evaluation of a large Jewish communal agency required one consultant half-time and one permanent staff member one-third time for one

year at a total cost of approximately \$50,000, an amount equivalent to 1.7 percent of the agency's annual budget. Staff and board coordination of the project should ideally be handled by one permanent staff member, even if a consultant is engaged. This validates the importance of the study and builds in eventual utilization of the fundings.

If the evaluation of an organization is being conducted by the Federation, trust, cooperation, and mutual support are essential. The top lay leadership and executive of the agency under review need to see the benefits of new ideas, must be of assistance in reducing staff distrust, and have constructive expectations. At the outset, the agency must see the pay-offs of the evaluation and explicitly agree that it is worth the effort.

In short, an evaluation should only be undertaken if the answers are positive to most of the questions in Figure 2.

⁴ See "Getting Ready and Getting Started" in Austin, op. cit., pp. 29-65.

Figure 2 Evaluation Preparedness Checklist

		Yes	No
l.	Are there sufficient funds, time, and properly trained staff to carry out the evaluation?		
2.	Is one permanent staff person		
	available and competent to act as a project coordinator?		
3.	Has the agency shown a willingness		
	to take <i>risks</i> and try new approaches?		_
4.	Are the agency executive and presi-		
	dent committed to the evaluation, willing to be supportive, and capable of controlling distrust?		
5.	Does a body exist within or outside of the agency to monitor and <i>im</i> -		_
	plement the fundings?	_	

What Are the Different Types of Evaluations?

Agency evaluation should be continuous. When it is ongoing, we refer to it as "monitoring." Monitoring seeks to determine whether activities have been implemented as planned; deviations being itemized and explicated. Management Information Systems (MIS) fit into this category. They answer seven management questions: Who? Did what? To whom? When? Where? What happened? How much did it cost?

Computerized MIS's are especially concerned with program coverage-the extent to which an activity is reaching the target group it is supposed to reach. Our experience with MIS's at the Jewish Federation Council in Los Angeles demonstrates the need for extensive training and retraining of case-workers who provide the data, and qualitycontrol checks to minimize errors. Despite these caveats, a well developed MIS will provide reliable statistical information on client characteristics, sources of referral into the program, diagnosis of the client's problems, use of worker time, and case disposition. Such quantitative data are essential to solidify

our credibility with funding sources, such as the United Way, external grants, or Federation contributors.⁵

In contrast to continuous evaluation, there are *one-shot* or periodic varieties: efficiency study, impact assessment, and administrative review. In order to undertake any of these procedures, we first need to know the agency's or program's desired outcomes—statements which indicate the criteria of success. Ambiguous statements, such as to "promote the continuity of the Jewish people," must be transformed into clear, specific, and measurable aims.

There are three techniques particularly helpful in specifying objectives.⁶

- 1. Use strong verbs. Action verbs describe observable or measurable behavior. "To increase the use of Jewish educational curriculum materials in classrooms" is an observable behavior. "To increase" is stronger than weaker verbs, such as "to enhance," "to promote," or "to encourage."
- 2. State single aims. Although agencies and programs have multiple objectives, each should be stated individually. Illustrations of single purpose objectives include: "begin five support groups for children of Holocaust survivors," or "conduct fund raising assistance programs in 36 synagogues."

⁵ Jack L. Franklin and Jean H. Thrasher, An Introduction to Program Evaluation. New York: A. Wiley—Interscience Publication, John Wiley & Sons, 1970. This volume includes a chapter on selecting an evaluation methodology. Continuous versus one-shot evaluations are dealt with on pp. 20–43.

⁶ Stephen Shortell and William Richardson, Health Program Evaluation; Issues and Problems in Health Care Series. St. Louis: C. V. Mosby Co., 1978. Strategies for specifying objectives are treated in Chapter 2, "The Evaluation Process," pp. 16–37. The Appendix explains how to carry out a multiple time series evaluation of a health screening program. It is schemata which can be used in other settings.

3. Specify sought-after results or outcomes. Each aim must have specific end products that are clear and, wherever possible, measurable. The time horizon must be noted. An example would be "conduct fund raising assistance programs in 36 synagogues between January and March in order to achieve a 10 percent increase in the numbers of contributors to the United Jewish Fund."

After objectives are properly specified, efficiency, impact or structure is studied. Measuring efficiency deals with cost benefit or resource allocations. Examples: The benefits of a Jewish vocational service training project might entail higher earnings and job security for Russian immigrants; the benefits of Jewish senior citizen housing might include increased security and health for the residents. Costs include opportunity costs (foregone opportunities for the client or agency to do other things), expenditures, facilities, and labor.

Not all benefits may be monetized. In many instances, our outputs have nothing to do with economics. However, even in those cases, this is a useful approach. Alternative programs with similar objectives are evaluated in terms of how much they cost. If our goal is to upgrade the Hebrew literacy and Israel identification of Jewish adolescents, we might be better off subsidizing them for a summer in Israel than enrolling them in some other Jewish educational format. Such an issue can be subjected to cost-benefit analysis.⁷

Impact assessment seeks to ascertain whether the program/activity is achiev-

ing its intended effects. Two caveats should be borne in mind: first, individual social interventions generally have a limited impact. For example, a series of synagogue chavurot will not totally eradicate lack of involvement in a temple, but they may moderately increase worship attendance among a significant minority.8 Second, it is extremely hard to evaluate ongoing programs that have been operating for a long time. To build up expertise in evaluation, agencies should first try to assess new programs or changes in current activities. It is far simpler to integrate an evaluation component into the start-up of a project.

Powerful impact research designs involve control groups and comparative statistical information on participants and non-participants, before and after the interventions. We aim to isolate probable, not certain, causes of change in a client group, and to rule out extraneous factors, such as placebo effects. Such experimental frameworks require high standards of validity and reliability. A less rigorous but highly informative approach is administrative review, to which the balance of this article is devoted.

⁷ An excellent example of an efficiency study is Jacob Ukeles, *Doing More With Less: Turning Public Management Around*. New York: American Management Association, 1982. Although the thrust of the text is the public sector, many of the cost containment measures are applicable to the voluntary field.

⁸ Bernard Reisman, *The Chavurah: A Contemporary Jewish Experience*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1977.

^b Among the classic texts are Donald Campbell and Julian Stanley, Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963 and Sidney Siegel, Nonparametric Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences. New York: McGraw Hill, 1956.

¹⁰ A significant question is: "Did the program matter?" or "How do we know if the client is cured?" For example, psychologist Bernie Zilbergeld argues in *The Shrinking of America* (reviewed in *Time Magazine*, May 23, 1983, p. 60) that patients who have had psychotherapy undergo only minimal and brief changes. They may feel better but, Zilbergeld argues, that therapy often produces only mediocre results. The issue is whether people who are exposed to programs are better off than people who are not.

Administrative Review: Case Study

In addition to efficiency and impact studies, an administrative review is a vital management tool. The Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles recently completed a major administrative review in which the author served as Project Director. It is a prototype. This Bureau of Jewish Education Review was divided into three phases: (a) Summer-Fall, 1981: Formulation of the Review guidelines and construction of an atmosphere receptive to undertaking a review process; (b) November, 1981-December, 1982: Compilation of the data; building a constructive change attitude among the agency leadership and main stakeholders; formal adoption of the Review recommendations by the Bureau of Jewish Education and the Federation; (c) January-December, 1983: Implementation of the Review under the guidance of an implementation "coach," an outside expert in renewing educational systems.11

The Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education is a complex and comprehensive central agency. At the time of the Review it had an annual budget of \$3.1 million; received \$2.4 million or 22% of all local Federation allocations; had a staff complement of 29 full-time equivalents; served 150 schools; and operated \$800,000 worth of high school and family programs. The goal of the Review was to emerge with a communal consensus on the mission, scope, program, and services of the agency.

Five generic issues were analyzed, which are on the agenda of most administrative reviews.¹²

Mission

- —Should the agency have an unlimited set of responsibilities or should it have a defined specific role?
- —Should the agency conduct functional programs? If so, of what kind?
- —What are the agency's primary and secondary responsibilities? How should financial and staff resources reflect these?

Governance

- —Should the organization be a Federation department or an independent agency?
- —What should be the relationships between the community, the board of directors, and professional staff?
- —How should the Federation and agency relate to each other?

Management

- —How are staff time and priorities allocated?
- —How are staff work quantity and quality measured? What are staff's least and most effective areas? How might staff be most effectively organized?
- —How can communications channels, supervisory relations, and morale be improved?

Service Delivery

- —How might the agency more effectively and efficiently meet the needs of its target groups? What are the advantages and disadvantages of alternative programs?
- —How should services be evaluated and long-term planning take place?

Interorganizational Relationships

- —How should the agency interact with other communal organizations, Federation agencies, synagogues, and universities?
- —How should the agency interface with Federation regions?

Besides these generic issues, three areas were explored which are unique to a central educational agency—standard setting, constituency relationships, and financial allocations.

¹¹ Adrianne Bank, Bureau of Jewish Education Review, Volumes 1 and 2. Los Angeles: Jewish Federation Council, November, 1982 and April, 1983.

¹² Adrianne Bank and Charles Zibbell, Guidelines for Review of Bureau of Jewish Education Los Angeles. New York: Council of Jewish Federations, 1981.

What Makes a Review Successful?

Fifty-three specific recommendations emerged from this Review. Federation, agency, school, and Jewish university leadership have applauded the Review and are together seriously collaborating on implementing the findings.¹³ The Bureau of Jewish Education Review was successful for eight reasons. In formulating an evaluation, these factors should be taken into consideration.

1. Partnership

After some initial disagreements about the scope and functions of the Bureau of Jewish Education Review, the "movers and shakers" in the Review became partners invested in the study. The Federation Planning and Budgeting Department lay and professional leadership; Federation Jewish Education Committee; a specially formed Review Reference Committee: the consultant; and the lay leadership and many of the professionals of the agency under review came to see the value of getting the agency to rethink its mission and functions. This was accomplished through a carefully worked out and ongoing orientation process. Unless all of these actors cooperated, the undertaking could have been aborted.

The major stakeholders felt a sense of ownership of the process from the outset. They were involved in clarifying the rationale for the Review, specifying how the results would be used, employing the principal investigator, and agreeing on the study format, instruments, and procedures. This built a commitment to use the report.

2. Problem Orientation

The Review was problem-oriented. It

¹³ At the time of the Review, the Bureau of Jewish Education was a Federation Department. One of the outcomes of the Review was to recommend a shift to an agency status. For the purposes of this article, agency, organization, and department are being used synonomously.

analyzed problems—deficiencies in organizational functioning. Problems were selected that were amenable to positive change. Examples included problems in staff deployment, school services, and interorganizational relationships. We deliberately decided not to do a need assessment inquiring into the overall state of Jewish education in the community. We avoided too broad a scope. Problems were picked which were seen as critical to the improvement of Jewish education and that the Bureau of Jewish Education had the *capacity* to impact.

3. High Credibility

Our stress was on producing a fair and unbiased Review. Confidentiality was essential. Individuals were generally able to speak openly without fear that their remarks would be held against them. To ensure impartiality, support information was gathered from numerous sources: interviews of agency and Federation staff, lay leadership, rabbis, and principals; site visits to service consumers (schools); mail surveys to direct service users (principals); open meetings in five different geographic areas; consultations with outside experts and academicians; and personal/telephone sessions with Bureau of Jewish Education executives around the country.

4. Commitment of Agency Lay Leadership to Constructive Change

The agency President and his top leadership did everything possible to make the Review succeed. Ongoing communication and feedback were provided to them. This reduced the threat of the Review, built confidence, and was a mechanism to verify the validity of the information gathered. Their investment in the process was essential.

5. Manageability

This was a workable enterprise because we did everything possible to constantly refine and focus. We did not want to be overwhelmed with data. The consumers were identified—schools. The outputs of the agency clarified—school improvement. Little interorganizational overlap and competition was noted. As we progressed into the Review, these facts crystallized and helped us sharpen our centers of interest even further. It is important to be very flexible and make corrections, when needed, in the evaluation design.

6. Structured Feedback System

Findings and preliminary recommendations were shared on a regular basis at briefing sessions for the main stakeholders—lay and professional. Brainstorming techniques were used at countless meetings. Information accuracy was tested and action plans formulated in this collaborative fashion. It added a considerable amount of time but invested the "partners" in the outcome.

7. Implementation and Monitoring Body Final evaluation reports should include a diagnosis of the organization's problems, prescriptions on how to ameliorate them, and a month by month implementation schema—who will do what, when, and how. A monitoring body should ideally be in place prior to an administrative review. In our case, the Jewish Education Committee of Federation had such a continuous relationship with the department and fulfilled the monitoring function. Implementation reports were presented by the implementation "coach," an expert academician, twice per year.

8. Outside Investigator

It is helpful to hire a consultant to conduct the field work and help structure the review. It is equally important to have a permanent staff member in the monitoring body, such as the Federation, who is knowledgeable in evaluation methodology and group process. The inside staff person must know thoroughly the central actors in the area being studied and have a thorough

comprehension of the subject matter being reviewed. The evaluator brings his expertise. The permanent staff person acts as the "reality filter;" liaison to the stakeholders; and supervises the evaluator. We were fortunate to have engaged an outstanding evaluator who embodied Robert Stake's ideal:

The wisdom of the evaluator's findings will be little appreciated if couched in words that hurt too little or too much.

Sometimes instructive, sometimes demanding, the evaluator should know how to bite gently.¹⁴

In sum, an administrative review should attempt to incorporate the eight aforementioned components. Taken together they help ensure that the review will have a "zero shelf-life."

We have Evaluated our Jewish Family Service, Now What Do We Do?

You have spent one year and \$25,000 doing an efficiency, impact, or administrative evaluation of your Jewish family service. How can the odds be raised to make sure that it gets used? My response would be to recognize the political nature of evaluation and use it to your advantage.¹⁵

Politics may be defined as who gets what, when, and how, especially through power.¹⁶ Evaluation is em-

¹⁴ Robert Stoke, Evaluation News. August, 1982.

¹⁵ My perspective on the politicization of evaluation derives from Carol H. Weiss, "Where Politics and Evaluation Research Meet," *Evaluation*, 1:3 (1973), pp. 37ff.

¹⁶ The political character of the Jewish polity is explained in Daniel Elazar, Participation and Accountability in the Jewish Community. New York: Council of Jewish Federations, 1980. Evaluation is a "rational" instrument to create social change. The politics of the change process is addressed in Martin Meyerson and Edward C. Banfield, Politics, Planning, and the Public Interest. New York: Free Press, 1964; Roland Warren, Truth, Love, and Social Change and Other Essays on Community Change. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973; and Gerald Zaltman et al., Creating Social Change. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972.

bedded in politics; it is not merely getting the facts. The agency being evaluated has been defined and funded through a political process and the evaluation recommendations are debated in the decision-making arena. Stakeholders have varying interests and motivations; they represent both obstacles and opportunities.

Evaluators need to acknowledge that Jewish communal programs have emerged through opposition, bargaining, and ultimately some degree of consensus. The reputations of the agency's backers, staff jobs, and the careers of administrators may be jeopardized by the evaluation. The sensitivities of these persons must be respected by the evaluator who holds tremendous power and legitimacy. In this manner, the stakeholders may become allies instead of hindrances.

One should not assume that top administrators will automatically respond to evaluation results by reforming their agency. However, I am convinced that by adhering to some of the principles set forth in this paper, the likelihood is increased that the agency will "own" the report and do something about it. By building in extensive involvement—lay and professional—of the agency under review and the agency doing the review, evaluation evidence can make a decisive difference.

In this essay, we traced the growth of action-oriented evaluation, examined under what circumstances it should be undertaken, discussed alternative approaches, and explained how an administrative review can work. As I consider the application of evaluation to Jewish communal organizations, I am reminded that,

In the beginning, you think.

In the end, you act.

In between, you negotiate the possibilities.

Anon.

Evaluation research is a means to

negotiate the possibilities more rationally.

Glossary of Key Evaluation Concepts

Cost-Benefit Analysis: Studies of the relationships between costs and outcomes of social projects, usually expressed in monetary terms.

Delivery System: Organizational arrangements, including staff, procedures, activities, physical plants, money, time, and materials, needed to provide program services.

Impact Assessment: Evaluation of the extent to which a program causes changes in the desired direction in the target population.

Intervention: Any program or other planned effort designed to produce intended changes in a target population.

Target Population: Conditions, deficiencies or defects at which interventions are directed.

Management Information System (MIS): An ongoing data collection and analysis system, usually computerized, that allows timely access to service delivery and outcome information. MIS is central to a monitoring system.

Need Assessment: Systematic appraisal of type, depth, and scope of problems as perceived by target groups or experts.

Valid Measure: A measure for which there is evidence that it reflects the concept it is intended to measure.

Policy Significance: Extent to which findings are meaningful in the context of program costs, alternative interventions available, and the demand for intervention actions.

Note: This compendium is adapted from Peter Rossi and Howard Freeman, Evaluation: A Systematic Approach. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1982. The author has drawn heavily from this work in compiling this essay.