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## **OPERATIONAL DEFINITION:**

**Program Evaluation** is a cooperative, cyclical, and systematic process of critical reflection focused on a set of problems and programmatic attempts at solutions to those problems.

- It links clients, providers, decision-makers, and other stakeholders and can be carried out internally and/ or jointly with external evaluators.
- It entails collecting, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative or quantitative information about what programs are doing for purposes beyond mere process tracking and compliance, but rather to foster organizational learning, make judgments, or support decision-making and accountability—ultimately to improve results for clients.
- Specifically, it answers stakeholders' questions regarding a particular programmatic effort's effectiveness by measuring the extent to which it achieved its intended outcomes; testing its underlying theory or logic; assessing the extent to which it conforms to an existing program model; or identifying what parts of it are or are not working and for whom.
- It may also measure the extent to which the program, project, service, or intervention is efficient, worthwhile, or valuable; whether it results in any unintended positive or negative consequences and if so, for whom; and whether it achieves systematically disparate outcomes for different client groups.
- Because evaluation efforts are ultimately intended to improve client results rather than to promote or fundraise for programs or organizations, negative results are just as valuable to stakeholders as positive ones.
- The specific purpose of an evaluation effort determines its final form, including whether it results in a formal oral presentation, written report, or other product.

The American Evaluation Association (AEA) has identified the following 5 **Guiding Principles** for evaluators:

1. **Systematic inquiry:** Evaluators conduct systematic, data-based inquiries about whatever is being evaluated.
2. **Competence:** Evaluators provide competent performance to stakeholders.

3. **Integrity/ Honesty:** Evaluators ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire evaluation process.
4. **Respect for people:** Evaluators respect the security, dignity and self-worth of the respondents, program participants, clients, and other stakeholders with whom they interact.
5. **Responsibilities for general and public welfare:** Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare.

Evaluations can be held to the following 5 **Standards** developed by the Joint Committee on Evaluation Standards (a coalition of major professional associations—including AEA—concerned with the quality of evaluation):

1. **Utility:** Program stakeholders should find evaluation processes and products valuable in meeting their needs.
2. **Feasibility:** Evaluations should be effective and efficient.
3. **Propriety:** Evaluations should be proper, fair, legal, right and just.
4. **Accuracy:** Evaluation representations, propositions, and findings—especially that support interpretations and judgments about quality—should be dependable and truthful.
5. **Accountability:** Evaluation processes and products should be adequately documented and subject to analysis themselves.

More information about program evaluation can be found on the websites of the American Evaluation Association ([www.eval.org](http://www.eval.org)) and the Joint Committee on Evaluation Standards ([www.jcsee.org](http://www.jcsee.org)).