

# Effective Evaluation and Assessment

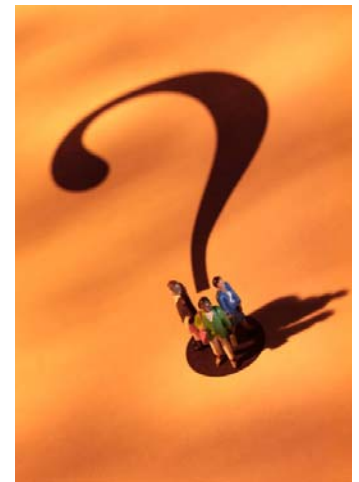
**CARSON RESEARCH CONSULTING, INC.**

## How Can You Benefit from Evaluation?

Maybe you have to conduct an evaluation as part of a grant that you received. Perhaps your board has been asking questions about outcomes, or maybe your staff is starting to wonder how effective a particular program is. Whether you are thinking about evaluation because of requirements or outside pressure, or you are just interested in learning more about how well your organization is doing, knowing the benefits of evaluation activities can help you get the most return out of every dollar you invest.

### If you are using your money wisely

These days, everyone is experiencing pressure to show how they have used the funds they have, and making difficult decisions about where to focus remaining funds. Evaluation can tell you if you are pouring money into a program that is not being implemented properly, or if the program is not producing the benefits you hoped for. It can also help you make a case for keeping a program or initiative that is on the chopping block. Just think how effective it will be to say "but we know that



80% of the kids in this program are able to read better than when they started!"

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### Who is Carson Research Consulting?

We design and conduct program evaluations for social service programs, agencies, and government entities. We have helped clients with strategic planning activities including logic modeling and conducting needs assessments, and we provide other research services such as conducting surveys or focus groups.

For more information, contact us, or visit our web site!

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## What IS Evaluation?

Evaluation is a very broad set of activities, but basically it includes anything that tells you how well you are doing. Some evaluation activities include:

- ◆ Identifying the problem you are trying to address
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- ◆ Reviewing the qualifications of staff to see if they meet minimum requirements for education and training
- ◆ Seeing who is participating in your program
- ◆ Keeping track of how long participants stay with the program
- ◆ Documenting changes in your community or city that resulted from your efforts
- ◆ Finding out if everyone is involved in the program or initiative that should be
- ◆ Finding out if members of a coalition are sharing information and resources

## How Can Evaluation Benefit You?

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### That you are a good bet for an outside funder

With increasing competition for funding from government and private sources alike, programs and organizations who can provide evidence that their programs work are at the head of the pack when it comes time to compete for scarce resources. Evaluating a program can not only allow you to demonstrate to potential funders the benefits of your program, it can also help you to show how efficiently you implemented the program and how well-run it is! Information about staff training and retention and the ability of program staff to recruit and retain participants is very persuasive.

### The unanticipated effects of your program

So you started a program for

troubled youth in a local high school, and then discovered that problem behavior doubled! Evaluation would help you to discover that kids who normally would have been thrown out are staying in school with the help of this program, but they are the most likely to be disruptive, so schools are having more incidents to report. This valuable information would help you to think about other measures of success (such as police records for troubled youth) that would better measure what you are trying to do.

### If you are a learning organization

Ultimately, evaluation should always be a program management tool. Evaluation is all about learning, gathering information about what is working and what isn't, finding out where you are duplicating efforts (Do all our pro-

grams have the same outcomes? Should we diversify?), and focusing your energy on what works, while devoting less time and energy to what is not effective. Evaluation helps you to improve what you do, making our organization more streamlined and helping you to have the most impact for the least amount of effort.

There are many excellent reasons to evaluate, whether you simply do an assessment using current staff and analyzing the information you already collect, or you hire an expert to conduct a full-fledged evaluation of one of your programs. Thinking about your programs, their activities, and the impact they have is an excellent way to improve what you do and make better management decisions.



*“There are two fundamental sources of energy that can motivate organizations: fear and aspiration. Fear can produce extraordinary changes in short periods, but aspiration endures as a continuing source of learning and growth”*  
 -Peter M. Senge  
*The Fifth Element”*

## Evaluation Resources!

For more information about evaluation, take a look at some of these great web sites!

**The WG Kellogg Foundation Program Evaluation Handbook** provides you with a blueprint for designing and conducting an evaluation. It is a very useful resource, whether you want to conduct an independent program evaluation on your own, or if you are working with an external evaluator of consultant.

You can also call and request a free hard copy of this helpful document! ([www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf](http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf))

**The Harvard Family Research Project** puts out a newsletter called **The Evaluation Exchange**. It contains valuable information for people providing services or designing programs for children and families. ([gseweb.harvard.edu/~hfrp/eval.html](http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hfrp/eval.html))

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