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# Evaluations and Alternatives

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**Choosing the Right Tool for the Job**

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## **Outline of Discussion**

1. Why Evaluate? Allocating Resources
  2. How to Evaluate? Methods Tradeoffs
    - Best methods
    - Appropriate methods
  3. What Scope? Micro vs. Macro
    - US Agency for International Development (USAID)
    - Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
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## Evaluation vs. Action

- There is never enough money to solve every problem
  - Evaluation takes money that could be spent on programs
  - This is an investment, to ensure that programs are run effectively, efficiently, and equitably
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## **Benefits of Evaluation**

- Avoid Spending Money on Programs that do not work
  - Make changes to improve effectiveness, efficiency, and equity
    - can lower costs or increase the reach of programs
  - Use evidence of success to justify program expansion
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# Common Approaches

- Desk Reviews
  - Observation/Case Study
  - Testimonial Evidence (interview, focus group, survey, etc)
  - Analysis of administrative, program, or related data
    - Descriptive
    - Quasi-Experimental
    - Experimental
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## **Limitations of Evidence**

Every approach carries limitations:

- Desk Reviews tend to overlook context
  - Individual Cases are not generalizable
  - Testimony always carries some degree of bias
  - Available data is often inappropriate or unreliable for different purposes
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## The Best Evaluations

In the U.S. - many researchers and policy makers claim that experimental approach (through random control trials) is the **\*best\*** evidence.

- They are wrong!
  - The best type of evidence depends on your research questions and goals!
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## **Common Types of Evaluation**

- Input: Focus on monitoring budget, staffing, and costs (Financial Audits, etc)
  - Process: Focus on management, prevention of fraud, waste, and abuse (Performance Audits, etc)
  - Output: Focus on measurable production (Performance Monitoring, etc.)
  - Outcome: Focus on longer-term goals (Impact, etc)
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# Choosing an Appropriate Approach

- Consider budget, staff, and time limitations
  - Consider what is already known about inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes
  - Consider focus on individual programs (micro) and overall government (macro)
    - Must use Macro to understand center-of government, as well as fragmentation, overlap, and duplication
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## **Example of Micro Focus: USAID**

### **Evaluations of International Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Aid:**

- Input: Ensure that Congressional earmarks are achieved, determine appropriate contract pricing
  - Process: Consider management and capacity building in country
  - Output: Number of people gaining access to water, improved sanitation, and hygiene training
  - Outcome: Changes in disease incidence and morbidity, economic production
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## **Limitations of Micro Focus**

**Input:** Failure to consider work done by US State Department, Department of Defense, and other assistance programs

**Process:** Failure to plan and collaborate with other US programs

**Outputs:** May provide water, improved sanitation, training to the same populations

**Outcomes:** Competing programs may be counter-productive

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## **Example of Macro Focus: OMB**

### **Evaluations of Cross-Agency Priority Goals**

- Input: requires goal leads to identify all relevant agencies/programs
  - Process: Collaboration required to define goals, set targets, develop metrics, and implement programs
  - Outputs: Attempt to comprehensively identify all related outputs
  - Outcomes: Considers interactions and synergies among programs
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## **Limitations of Macro Focus**

- Inputs: Impossible to include all stakeholders (small agencies, Congress are less involved), hard to share resources among agencies
  - Process: Collaboration among agencies can be costly, must be worth the investment
  - Output: Different agencies disagree over which outputs are most relevant
- Outcome: Parent agencies face multiple, conflicting goals
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## **"Evidence-Based Policy"**

In the US - Evidence Based Policy has become synonymous with experimental research and randomized control trials. This type of research is one of the best for examining impact, but cannot answer important questions about inputs and processes, and does not provide perfect answers to questions about outputs and outcomes.

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# Evaluation is NEVER perfect

- Evaluation is Fallible
- Evaluation is but one source of Evidence
- Evidence is but one input into Policy
- Policy is but one influence on Practice
- Practice is just one input into Performance
- Performance is just one input into Outcomes

(adapted from Weiss, Murphy-Graham, and Birkeland, 2005)

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## **Evaluation is necessary**

- Evaluation of Inputs is needed for managing program costs
  - Evaluation of Processes is needed for managing legal issues, customer service, and interagency relationships
  - Evaluation of Outputs is needed to ensure effective delivery of services
  - Evaluation of Outcomes is needed to ensure that goals are achieved
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# Evaluation Return on Investment

- In 2015, GAO saved the U.S. government more than \$100 for every \$1 spent on assessments
    - This money can be used to support new programs, or to expand existing ones
  - In addition, GAO's work led to dozens of non-financial improvements to effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of government programs
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# THANK YOU!

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