



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

When To Evaluate

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With a better understanding of who and what to evaluate, we can move on to *when* to evaluate clientele. There are many options for when to deliver an evaluation, and each option has pros and cons.

When to deliver an evaluation depends on:

- Purpose – is it for program improvement (formative) or measuring impact (summative)?
- Program dosage (how long and how often participants were part of a program)
- Evaluation of immediate/short-term indicators vs. medium-/long-term indicators
- Desire for statistical analysis

The table on page 2 compares and contrasts different evaluation designs based on when the evaluations are delivered. It utilizes information from University of California Extension's Key Survey Design Considerations for Program Evaluation in Cooperative Extension (Alviz, 2015).

In an example where you are evaluating work on sustainable energy, let's say you delivered a workshop that was part of an overall goal to increase installations of cost-effective solar energy. While an immediate after-only evaluation could gauge increases in knowledge of sustainable energy and awareness of contractor lists, a follow up evaluation could also gauge whether increases in knowledge and/or awareness may be correlated with installation of cost-effective solar energy. It would take two separate evaluations to accomplish this with pre-post methodology, but only one with a follow-up retrospective pre-post evaluation. Note, however, that a retrospective pre-post test is limited by the potential for motivational bias on behalf of respondents and may not be accepted for publication in some instances (Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Taylor, 2009).

The time interval to wait before disseminating a follow up evaluation should depend both on program dosage and when you reasonably expect that a desired change could occur. Follow up evaluation for low dosage programs (i.e. a single 1-hour workshop) could be disseminated within three months of the program, for example, whereas follow up evaluations for high dosage programs (i.e. a series of six 3-hour classes) could be disseminated 12 months after the program has ended.

Evaluation design	Description	Pros	Cons	When to use
During the program	Delivered in the midst of a one-off or multi-part program	Can improve the remainder of your program	Clients may request program changes that aren't feasible	For one-off programs, use to adjust the remainder of your program to ensure client satisfaction. For multi-part programs, use for this purpose and/or to assess immediate or short-term value in line with your logic model/theory of change.
After-only (immediate)	Delivered immediately after a program	Can capture most elements of a comprehensive evaluation	Cannot capture medium- and long-term indicators. No comparison data.	When wanting to deliver a fairly comprehensive evaluation that targets immediate and short-term indicators without the need for comparison data
After-only (follow up)	Delivered weeks to months after a program is completed	Can capture all elements of a comprehensive evaluation	Depending on "program dosage" (time spent in the program) and the time interval following program completion, clients may not be able to provide accurate feedback. No comparison data.	When wanting to deliver a comprehensive evaluation for a resource-intensive program that targets medium- and long-term indicators. Can be used in conjunction with after-only evaluations to more accurately capture feedback on client satisfaction and immediate and short-term indicators.
Pre-post (immediate or follow up)	Delivered both before and after a program	Can statistically assess indicators	Requires delivery of the same evaluation questions at two different times. Certain pre-post tests may be subject to "response shift bias" wherein clients may underestimate program effects. Requires tracking of pre- and post-program evaluation by respondent.	When delivering a resource-intensive program that would warrant robust comparison data. Commonly used when trying to statistically assess short-term indicators such as knowledge gain.
Retrospective pre-post (immediate or follow up)	Delivered once following a program	Can statistically assess indicators in a single evaluation	Is subject to "motivational bias" wherein clients may overestimate program effects in order to consciously or subconsciously please program administrators	When wanting to deliver a comprehensive evaluation for which statistical analysis would be beneficial. More appropriate for examination of subjective experiences of program-related change (i.e. participant interests) (Hill & Betz, 2005).