

Distinguishing Between Evaluation and Research

Program evaluation and research are similar, but they have different objectives and data standards. They are also different in size and scope. The following table shows important differences between them.

| | Evaluation | Research |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Objectives | Change and action oriented, aimed at determining impact | Aimed at causality, testing theory |
| Data | Evidentiary data | Very precise measurements |
| Numbers of Subjects | Program target groups or samples of target groups (sometimes very small) | Usually study of samples from fairly large populations |
| Standards | Usefulness, practicality, accuracy, ethicalness | Truth, causality, generalizability, theory |
| Costs | Range from minimal to fairly substantial | Usually, high costs |
| Stakes/Scope | Fairly low stakes, fairly narrow scope (the program) | Very high stakes (e.g., human life or health, |
| Focus | Whether something is being done well, not necessarily better. Should focus on context, activities, outcomes of participants | Determining the best treatments, solutions, etc. Can include community indicators where appropriate. |
| Use | Should not be conducted unless there is real opportunity to use the results | Sometimes conducted when the use is uncertain. |