Program Evaluation

According to the Office of Educational Assessment at the University of Washington (2005), “program evaluation is the systematic assessment of the processes and/or outcomes of a program with the intent of furthering its development and improvement. As such, it is a collaborative process in which evaluators work closely with program staff to craft and implement an evaluation design that is responsive to the needs of the program” (Frequently asked questions section, para. 1).

What do Evaluators do?

“Evaluation involves assessing the strengths and weaknesses of programs, policies, personnel, products, and organizations to improve their effectiveness” (American Evaluation Association, [AEA], 2013). Evaluators often work with programs that address important problems affecting society and its people. For example, evaluators work with programs that are designed to:

- Reduce rates of teenage pregnancy
- Increase rates of employment and reduce use of public assistance
- Prevent clinical depression among victims of trauma
- Reduce rates of exposure to HIV among people at risk
- Improve students’ reading achievement

Evaluations of such programs are conducted to answer such questions as:

- Does the program work?
- How does it work?
- Why does it work?
- For whom does it work best?
- Under what conditions does it work?
- How do we make it work better? (Donaldson & Christie, 2006).

Where do Evaluators work?

Evaluators work in variety of job settings. The top five include:

1. Non-profit organizations such as foundations or social service agencies
2. Schools and other educational institutions
3. Health care organizations
4. Government agencies
5. Corporations

Within these settings, evaluators can work internally for an organization or can work independently and be hired by an organization to conduct evaluations of a program or policy as needed by the organization (Donaldson & Christie, 2006).
Evaluators have diverse educational backgrounds. A person can work as an evaluator with a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree in any number of disciplines that provide training in research and evaluation methods, such as psychology, social work, education, public administration, or public health. Degrees in "program evaluation" are less common because there are a limited number of such programs. Ultimately, for a career in program evaluation a person must have education and training in evaluation theory, methods, and practice skills, which can be obtained through a variety of educational backgrounds. For more information about graduate degree and certificate programs that provide such training, please refer to the American Evaluation Association website - http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=43.

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<td><a href="http://www.ioce.net/en">www.ioce.net/en</a></td>
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To learn more about careers in Program Evaluation, check out:

References


