

Preface

The *Encyclopedia of Evaluation* is a who, what, where, how, and why of evaluation. Evaluation is a profession, a practice, a discipline—and it has developed and continues to develop through the ideas and work of evaluators and evaluation theorists working in real places with high hopes for social improvement. Each individual entry in this book gives a glimpse of a particular aspect of this development, and taken as a whole, the encyclopedia captures the history of evaluation in all these many ways.

In conceptualizing what this book would include, my intention was to capture the components that make evaluation a *practice*, a *profession*, and a *discipline*. Evaluation is an ancient practice and, indeed, probably the most common form of reasoning used by all people virtually all the time. All humans are nascent evaluators. The more formal practice of evaluation has moved from the margins to the center of many organizations and agencies. Once it was work primarily practiced under other names and as a part-time activity. Evaluation practice has become institutionalized, it is common practice, and indeed, it is an important commodity in social and political life. Evaluation practice is not institutionalized in the same way around the world, but the reaches of development organizations and globalization have meant that evaluation, like many commodities, is traded worldwide.

Also, the practice of evaluation has grown, expanding to include much more than the earliest notions, which borrowed heavily from traditional social science approaches to research. Although the methods of psychology and psychometrics continue to be a mainstay, evaluation practice has expanded, drawing on many more disciplines, such as anthropology, ethics, political science, literary criticism, systems

theory, and others, for inspiration. It is a complex and varied practice, sometimes even incoherent. This encyclopedia covers all of these areas, providing the reader with information on the many perspectives in evaluation.

As the practice of evaluation has grown worldwide, evaluation has become increasingly professionalized. Evaluation has grown into its professional posture as it has developed into a group of people recognized as having special knowledge and skills that serve a useful purpose. Formal educational programs, associations, journals, and codes of professional and ethical conduct are a central part of the profession of evaluation.

This profession is tied together by the discipline of evaluation. Although narrow conceptions of “discipline” might not apply to evaluation, there are basic concepts that underlie and inform the practice of evaluation. Granted, there is much lively discussion, debate, and critique of these concepts, another indicator of evaluation’s arrival as a discipline. A good example is the basic concept of *stakeholder involvement* in the discipline of evaluation. This is a core idea with which every evaluator and evaluation theorist agrees, although, of course, the details of what it means to different evaluators are different. Another example is the essential understanding that what distinguishes evaluation is that it is about value, not truth (although naturally there are lively discussions about the relationship between value and truth).

The entries in this encyclopedia capture this sense of evaluation as a practice (methods, techniques, roles, people), as a profession (professional obligations, shared knowledge, ethical imperatives, events, places), and as a discipline (theories and models of evaluation, ontological and epistemological issues).

An attempt has been made to convey a global, international view of evaluation. Although it is the case that much of the evaluation literature is from the United States, and the history of strong American governmental support for evaluation has had a profound impact on the nature of evaluation, so has the U.S. export of evaluation had an impact on the proliferation and development of evaluation around the world. Indeed, evaluation in other parts of the world has exploded, as indicated by the creation of professional evaluation associations on every continent. Development agencies have played a key role in spreading evaluation because of the accountability side of assistance to developing countries.

The encyclopedia will be useful to evaluation practitioners, theorists, and the public—people who may simply want to understand the terms and concepts of evaluation that are a part of everyday life.

ORGANIZATION AND USER SUGGESTIONS

The key word list for the encyclopedia was created through content analyses of frequently used texts in evaluation, evaluation journals around the world, and in collaboration with the Editorial Board. That key word list includes concepts, models, techniques, applications, theories, events, places, people, and things, and the book began with a much longer list than those that found their way into the finished volume. The final choice of what was included or excluded rests entirely with me as the Editor. There were entries and contributors I would have liked to include, but for a multitude of different reasons that was not possible. A special comment about the inclusion of people in the encyclopedia is necessary—the list of *who* to include was created in the same way as other terms. Some people chose not to be included, and others we were unable to contact. The book is, in that sense, incomplete. It does not exhaustively cover each and every element of evaluation or every person or event that has contributed to evaluation. It is, however, a single reference source that captures the essence of evaluation, one that provides definitions, covers the complexity of approaches to evaluation, and illustrates the central issues being addressed by the field.

The book is organized alphabetically. There is a Reader's Guide, organized into 18 thematic categories, that provides a quick overview of the almost 600 entries. Most entries provide suggestions for further reading that

will take the reader into greater depth and detail related to the entry, and where useful, cross-referencing to other entries in the encyclopedia has been provided, with the occasional use of blind entries to redirect the reader when more than one term might be used for a given topic.

In an effort to provide a more global picture of evaluation, the contributors are from around the world, representing most regions. In addition, there are a number of stories about evaluation practice around the world that are set off as sidebars in the text. These stories provide a glimpse into the nature of evaluation practice in a diverse set of circumstances, delineate the common and uncommon issues for evaluators around the world, and point to the complexities of importing evaluation from one culture to another. These stories appear in the encyclopedia contiguous to an entry related to the substance of the story.

In all cases, the entry author's name appears at the end of the entry, and in the absence of a name, the reader should assume that the Editor is the author of that entry.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A project of this magnitude is possible only with the help of many, many people. C. Deborah Laughton had the idea for this book, and without her initiative, support, and commitment to evaluation, it would not have happened. I continue to benefit from her commitment to the field and to creating good books. The people at Sage Publications who were instrumental to its completion are Rolf Janke, Lisa Cuevas-Shaw, Yvette Pollastrini, Margo Crouppen, and Melanie Birdsall, and I appreciate all they have done. The American Evaluation Association Board of Directors endorsed this project as worthwhile and me as a worthy editor.

Obviously, this encyclopedia would not be were it not for the more than 100 contributing authors, evaluators from around the world. I feel privileged to have worked with this international, diverse, committed group of individuals. I hope they forgive my nagging to get the entries completed and share a sense of pride in what we have created together.

Then there are those who agreed to serve on the Editorial Board, all of whom read long lists of terms, gave thought to what should be included and what should not, volunteered to write entries (sometimes

on very short notice), reviewed entries, and provided ongoing collegial support. I want especially to thank Michael Patton, Hallie Preskill, and Tom Schwandt for their incredible responsiveness and willingness to help me out whenever I asked. Also, thanks to Saville Kushner for his commitment and good ideas; Lois-ellin Datta for her affirmational messages, which reminded me of the importance and value of this project when it seemed especially onerous, and Melissa Freeman and Cheryl MacNeil for helping me to do the research for the biographical entries—but most especially, for their friendship.

Everything I do in my life, personal and professional, is done with the support and love of Wayne and Colin. I write this preface on a day when Colin gets his report card and we discuss the meaning of evaluation—the relationship between judging and improving, the pain and the glory of good and bad. My codification of this set of evaluation words and meanings was, in part, inspired by Colin's joy in the discovery of words and meaning. And always there for me is Wayne, providing encouragement and giving joy to my life, in every way and every day.

—*Sandra Mathison*
Editor