

7. EVALUATING PEER PROGRAMS

Differences Between Program Evaluation and Quality Assurance and Improvement

For many organizations, evaluation is already an essential component of your HIV program(s). Some organizations may call it quality management, some may call it quality improvement, and some are tracking numbers, demographics and services offered or accessed. All of these are a form of evaluating your program and each provides different data which can be used to revise and improve programs and services. In the literature, there are different terms that can be used to describe evaluation activities. There are a wide variety of evaluation designs including continuous quality improvement methods. The chart below describes the differences between program evaluation and continuous quality improvement.

| Program evaluation may be seen as an extension of program quality assurance, quality management, or quality improvement activities. | |
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| Differences between Program Evaluation and Quality Assurance and Improvement¹ | |
| Program Evaluation | Quality Assurance/Improvement |
| 1. Conducted independently of routine program activities | 1. Conducted as part of routine program activities |
| 2. Performed by program staff, dedicated evaluation staff, or consultants | 2. Performed by program staff or internal evaluation staff |
| 3. Designed to answer specific questions about program implementation, acceptability, effectiveness, and/or relevance. | 3. Designed to ensure that program meets or exceeds quality standards and benchmarks in order to continuously improve service delivery |
| 4. Addresses values and priorities of stakeholders (i.e., patients/clients, program staff, funders, community representatives affected by program activities) | 4. Addresses professional standards and benchmarks |

¹Patton, Utilization Focused Evaluation, 1997

There are numerous designs from which to choose to conduct program evaluation, with quantitative evaluation designs used more often than qualitative. (See [Section 7.3 Data Collection Methods](#) for a discussion of qualitative and quantitative methods.) Quantitative and qualitative evaluation designs are based on different paradigms. Although both designs are equipped to stand alone, they may be combined in what is referred to a **mixed methods** approach. The key to evaluating your program is a simple, user-friendly design. For more information on program evaluation, see [Additional Evaluation Resources and Websites](#) for a list of publications and websites for further reading.

This “Read More” section accompanies [Section 7 Evaluating a Peer Program](#), part of the online toolkit *Building Blocks to Peer Program Success*. For more information, visit http://www.hdwg.org/peer_center/program_dev.

¹Patton, Michael Quinn. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 3rd edition. Sage Publications 2002.