

Evaluating Social Welfare Programs: The Challenge and its Methods

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In most Western countries there is growing public interest in evaluating social welfare programs. Contributing organizations and donors have special interest in reviewing evaluations that examine such programs' effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, most welfare programs are today expected to define their social 'mission': to specify their goal and organizational objectives. To evaluate a social welfare program, one can examine its resources, check its organizational and operational methods, monitor the volume and quality of services provided to the public and finally, test whether or not the specific program elements helped achieve the desired objectives. Furthermore, each social welfare program may be asked to examine whether it serves the population that it was designed for, and to what extent the program covers this specific population. Evaluating a program can be 'formative' – steering the program while in operation – or 'summative' – evaluating a project after its closure. Program evaluation can be done 'from within', or by professional evaluators 'from without'. The article specifies the elements underlying program evaluation and discusses their theoretical and practical implications.

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