

# METHOD FOR THE EVALUATION OF SOCIAL PROJECTS

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## **Abstract**

This instrument was part of the research project "Research on Evaluation of Health and Education Plans and Programs in the Province of Buenos Aires", developed by the of Chair Preventive Psychology of the Psychology course of studies at the School of Humanities and Educational Sciences, National University of La Plata (Argentina).

The basis for proposing an assessment instrument is the need for a method enabling analysis, systematization of knowledge and the assignment of values distributed into scales and organized in general charts, on social programs. Its main concern is the analysis of health and education programs and projects, restricted to certain specific areas or regions, in search for theoretic trustworthiness, methodological accuracy as well as pragmatic operability. This is the result of four years of researching said programs at system, service and community levels.

**Key words:** Method; evaluation; projects; social

This instrument for evaluation was elaborated within the project "Research on Evaluation of Health and Education Plans and Programs in the Province of Buenos Aires", corresponding to the program of Incentives for Research the Secretariat of Science and Technique of the National University of La Plata directs. It has been part of the activities carried out by the Chair Preventive Psychology at the School of Humanities and Educational Sciences. The method was constructed through testing, trial, error and correction during the four years the project lasted, until it reached a certain degree of congruency, consistence and effectiveness.

The basis for proposing an instrument for evaluation is the need for a method enabling analysis, systematization of knowledge and the assignment of values, distributed in scales and organized in general charts, on social programs, specially in health and education programs and projects, and restricted to certain specific areas or regions. It does not mean there are no instruments of the kind: we have seen many proven ones and some good ones in particular; even so, we have considered reformulation necessary in terms of the use of instruments for evaluation. What has been seen up to date offers, together with interesting proposals and questions, an excessive amount of situations, viewpoints, category disintegration, technical complexities and a multiplicity of orientations making

extremely difficult to perform the evaluation with theoretic trustworthiness, methodological accuracy as well as pragmatic operability. That is to say, it would be advisable –not to say indispensable– to purge excessive material, calibrate the objective, restate the theory on which it is based, and to fine-tune techniques and methods that might let us reach the crucial points to be evaluated. Dispersion and erratic movements of such proposal should also be avoided.

This particular approach has led us to several concurrent decisions that reflect in the construction of an instrument for evaluation with enhanced capacity to look for what is really wanted, to group, systematize, conclude and recommend with competence, conciseness and practice. The first decision refers to setting up a strategic methodology that would select criteria and operations adequate to the material to be evaluated. This decision supports the strategic principle of selection and a set of highly reduced and systematized procedures leading directly to the operation center, with no useless deviations or complications, in search for the information necessary to perform an evaluation. This operative direction ensures better conditions of validity, reliability, accessibility, practicability, effectiveness and efficiency in the evaluation of social programs.

The second decision concerns the setting up of a strict course through the theoretic frames different authors, researchers and evaluators have stated and used in the design of evaluation programs, specially when they are concentrated on the health and education areas, and when the particularities of the regions considered are taken into account. Knowing of the state of the art lets us know what has been done so far, no duplication of efforts or discovery of what has already been discovered being necessary.

The third decision dealt with the deliberate use of elements and experiences extracted from the very social programs under analysis, of their operations, management, and the target community itself. That is, evaluations, together with their objectives, products, actors and targets and up becoming an active part not only of evaluations but are also active in the construction of more apt instruments for future evaluation, surpassing the limitations shown by the instruments then valid.

The fourth decision concerns providing conceptual structures and processes that are open, flexible, critic and contingent, that might make the correction, addition and rejection of any necessary thing possible in the same use and realization of the instrument. So this proposal is considered to be just an improved approach to the problem of evaluating social programs, specially those of certain characteristics and in particular areas and regions. This proposal, far from concluding the process of methodological and technical construction, pays attention to every test and modification that field work generates in the course of evaluations.

Consequently, the instrument for evaluation that is suggested –open and capable of being perfected– is made up of a set of criteria that shall guide the task, giving rise to the construction of the respective indicators (and indexes), as well as to the shaping of a scale order resulting in a general chart of synthesis. These elements and levels of analysis shall permit an improved and more accurate approach to the evaluation process of the social programs in health and education in the Province of Buenos Aires, and finally, to put the instruments constructed to a test as regards their scope, and the possibilities of transfer and replication in other works and environments.

Let us consider each of the above-mentioned criteria and the final synthesis:

### **1st CRITERION**

It answers to the *problem* of what the social program to be evaluated aims at doing and achieving. The following items should be answered here:

- what the subject is. What it refers to.
- objectives. Where it plans to reach.
- solution of needs. Which the needs it meets are.
- social importance and relevance of solutions on account of said needs.

### **2nd CRITERION**

It answers to the problem of *how to do it*: which the sets of procedures and performance set out to reach the objectives are. The following items should be taken into account:

- list of activities and actions
- trying out a typology of actions
- analysis of three levels of performance:
  1. system
  2. executors
  3. doers
- analysis of pertinence of actions with regard to the previous criterion (1st criterion)
- community participation. Degrees, involvement, organization.

### **3rd CRITERION**

It answers to the problem of *resources* the program is supplied with in order to carry out the performances and reach the objectives.

- quantity, quality and availability of materials
- relation cost-benefit: efficiency. Economic profitability.
- relation actions-resources. Social profitability.

#### **4th CRITERION**

It answers to the stances of *power* the program is provided with or the ones it has to sort out.

- leadership / team
  1. capacity
  2. training
  3. dedication
- policy support
- continuity of staff and of the program
- problems on the line - discontinuity
- legitimacy - consensus - community and institutional support
- institutions involved.

#### **5th CRITERION**

It answers to the problem of *articulation* and congruence among the previous points and the real problems of the target community.

- internal coherence of program points. Degree of articulation.
- possible analysis of problems and requirements of the target community
  1. made by the program
  2. made by other institutions
- link between a) and b). External congruence.

#### **6th CRITERION**

It answers to the problem of the *time* the carrying out of the program shall demand, the time that is available and the time that is wasted. This question provides an answer to the when.

- programming time - execution time
- necessary time and variable time
- current stage of the program
- time and resources
- time and policy.

#### **7th CRITERION**

It answers to the problem of *where*; where the work is done. The following items have to be considered:

- place of work
- variations and changes according to stages and courses of action

- available infrastructure

### **8th CRITERION**

It answers to the problem of *results* of the application of the program. Here the effects of the planned activities are measured. It is here that the real products of programmatic development are evaluated. In fact, the adjustment of the previous points comes together in the results achieved.

- changes in the target community
- changes at the three levels: system - executors - doers
- relation cost-result. Effectiveness.
- unexpected, unforeseen results. Evaluation of impact.

### **9th CRITERION**

It refers to the main specific problems detected acting as *obstacles* to the carrying out of the programs. Problems detected in the analysis of the previous criteria are focused and extracted. Let us see these items:

- program weaknesses and application weak points
- difficulties
  1. detected on the line
  2. detected in the community
  3. detected in policy
- analysis of adverse strategies. Attacks on the program, the leadership, the line.

### **10th CRITERION**

It refers to the analysis of the systems for *recording* data and information the program provides. An extreme weakness in the use of these programs has been perceived, in spite of their key function in the development of the program. The items are:

- systems for data collection
- matrices, bases, codas, etc.
- use and handling of information

### **11th CRITERION**

It refers to the use of *communication* systems and is particularly linked to the previous criterion. However, notice there may be records without communicational bases. Not only does this weakness make the internal process difficult but it also makes transfers to other institutions difficult. The items are:

- feed-back on the line. Feed-back system.

- information exchange capacity
- intercommunicating institutions, noise, collapse.

### **12th CRITERION**

It refers to the *analysis* of those specific and general legal rules providing the legal frame in which the program develops. It also takes into account bureaucratic regulations and any other kind of legal formalization.

- juridic-legal frame
- institutional regulations
- bureaucratic-administrative culture.

### **13th CRITERION**

It refers to the factors of cultural type affecting the progress of the program, both for and against. Subcultures of the target community, ethnic groups, races, etc. participating as frame and as operativa strategies.

- cultures and subcultures
- ethnic groups, races, others
- sociocultural movements
- institutional cultures

### **14th CRITERION**

Suggested to become the weighted ordering factor of the set of criteria previously mentioned. Their respective indicators and values, strategically weighted, disintegrate information, articulate it and produce a final result. Grouping series of programs according to evaluative searches or the main set, to demonstrate the effectiveness of public and private policies in social matters, more relevant process, result and impact evaluations are obtained. Besides, these charts permit contrastive analysis between programs and groups of programs. They also enable information transfer towards the decision-making organisms, other institutions and the community itself, the main interested in the success or failure of those undertakings of social character. By way of example two charts with criteria 1 and 2 are shows, with their respective and possible indicators and scores. The total value that can be attained indicates the relative importance of each criterion as regards the rest. A possible consideration is taken by way of example; however, bear in mind that it can undergo variations according to the characteristics of the social programs to be analyzed and evaluated. There would be a maximum of 34 for the first criterion and of 60 for the second one. They are pointing to the relative importance of diagnosis of needs, of solutions, and of programmed procedures and/or executed to reach those aims.

The remaining criteria are apt to construct different considerations according to the conception of the evaluation team. (See charts of Criterion 1 –page 10– and of Criterion 2 –page 11 –).

The general chart shows 13 criteria deemed to be indispensable to obtain a complete evaluation of each program. Then, criterion 14 is excluded, and criterion 15 as well, for the latter refers to the presentation of final results and to the suggestions and recommendations made. (See general chart, page 12).

### 15th CRITERION

It refers to the analysis and elaboration of data collected. Evaluation and interpretation of results, specially in the light of the previous general chart. Formulation of conclusions. Suggestions and recommendations. Transfers to other fields. Suggestions and options. Elaboration and handing of evaluation reports in different formats, according to the demands set in previous agreements, the current and future needs, and the results found.

	LEVELS		
	High	Average	Low
Needs taken into account	6 – 10	3 – 5	0 – 2
solutions programmed	4 – 7	2 – 3	0 – 1
objectives stated	4 – 7	2 – 3	0 – 1
social relevance	6 – 10	3 – 5	0 – 2
<b>TOTAL</b>	20 – 34	10 – 16	0 – 6

	Score	Percentage	Program X
activities that reached the aim	8 - 15		
activities that partially reached the aim	1 - 7		
activities that did not reach the aim	0		
strategic-tactic activities	10 - 15		
tactic activities	4 - 9		
disperse activities	2 - 3		
erratic activities	1		
activities at doers + executors + system level	10 - 15		
activities at executors + system level	4 - 7		
activities at system level	1 - 3		
activities with high pertinence	10 - 15		
activities with average pertinence	5 - 9		
activities with low pertinence	1 - 4		
<b>TOTAL</b>	0 - 60		

**Note:** The numerical indicators of each of the four groups are mutually exclusive, i.e., for example, it is not possible to add "activities that reached the aim" and "activities that partially reached the aim", as an option has to be made.

#### 14<sup>th</sup> Criterion. General chart

Criteria with indicators Programs	SCORES													
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Total
Program 1														
Program 2														
Program 3														
Program 4														
Program ...n														

#### Notes

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