The Difference Between Research and Evaluation

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Research is often undertaken to:

- Prove a hypothesis
- Prove a theory
- Prove or validate works of earlier experts
- Generate new knowledge
- Make generalizations about completed studies or events
- Explain causes
- Intended to increase the body of knowledge on a particular issue
- Strictly controlled, cannot be modified during course of the experiment
- Dissemination involves publishing results
Evaluation

* Often focuses on improving the performance or efficiency of individuals, groups, programs, or policies
* Serves to tell how well a person or program is doing and what needs to be done to improve efficacy and efficiency
* Results of a program or policy evaluation can guide solutions to the problems and to improve the existing program for the target population
* Primary focus is to benefit the specific program target population
* Driven by key questions led by stakeholders
* Seeks specifics that show what is happening in a program or event Dissemination involves report to stakeholders
**Research vs. Evaluation**

**Research**

- Purpose is testing and producing generalizable results
- Scientific inquiry based on intellectual curiosity
- Questions originate with scholars in a particular discipline
- Advances broad knowledge and theory
- Conducted within a controlled setting
- Quality and importance judged by peer review

**Evaluation**

- Purpose is to determine the effectiveness of a particular model; judge merit or worth
- Questions originate with key stakeholders
- Policy and program interests of stakeholders paramount
- Provides information for decision-making on a specific program
- Conducted within a setting of changing actors, priorities, resources and timelines
- Quality and importance judged by those who will use the findings to take action and make decisions

Similarities Between Research and Evaluation

- Both enhance knowledge
- Use many of the same qualitative and quantitative methodologies and analytic techniques
- An activity could be both research and evaluation or neither
- Both make conclusions based on systematic data collection and analysis
- Both require ethical oversight
Program evaluation activities are not considered human subject research when:

* Data is collected internally and analyzed for the normal course of business and intent is only to provide information for, and about, the setting in which they are conducted
* They are conducted as part of the standard operating procedures of the setting
* They do not involve experimental or non-standard interventions
* Consists of searches of existing literature
* Involves de-identified data analysis

Program evaluation activities are **not** generally considered contributing to generalizable knowledge and usually do not need Human Subjects or Institutional Review Board approval
Evaluation—When it is Considered Human Subjects Research

* But...
* Program evaluation activities are considered human subject research when:
  * The information collected is going to be generalized to other programs
  * Publishing results in scholarly journals (the assumption that publishing the findings generalizes the data)
  * Evaluations are connected to groups’ or individuals’ outcomes
  * An evaluation impacts the replication of other programs, services, populations at large or public policy
  * An evaluation is implemented by third party agencies
Research vs. Evaluation “Bumper Stickers”

- Research generalizes, evaluation particularizes
- Research is designed to prove something, while evaluation is designed to improve something
- Research - what’s so? Evaluation – so what?
- Research – how it works? Evaluation – how well it works?
- Research is about what is; evaluation is about what is valuable
- Research provides the basis for drawing conclusions; evaluation provides the basis for decision making

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