



DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION (DE) is a powerful tool when program decision-makers dive into the work of solving complex social problems. New approaches—collaboration for collective action and systems change, reorganizing resources into new configurations, exploring possibilities that can be prototyped and tested—require highly adaptive strategies.

In complex situations, uncertainty can sap energy and lead to premature commitment to strategies, policies, and processes. Success calls for a systematic way to critically examine outcomes using robust, real-time feedback mechanisms. This is the role of developmental evaluation.

A DE evaluator works in partnership with the decision-making team from the earliest stages of a project, documenting the actions taken and the short-term results. Equipped with this ongoing, timely data, the evaluator facilitates the team's regularly scheduled reflective practice.

What are the results? What caused those results? What will we continue doing? What will we change? How will we adapt to changing circumstances or the emergence of new forces? What is the impact of changing social dynamics? How will we put into operation what we're learning?

Linear evaluation models—plan, act, and then evaluate—provide information at the end of the implementation process. In contrast, DE allows teams working in complex situations to make meaningful changes along the way and evaluate adaptations as they are put in place. In developmental evaluation, the planning, actions, and evaluation happen simultaneously.

The renowned evaluation expert Michael Quinn Patton coined the term developmental evaluation (*Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use*, 2010). The approach quickly gained traction.

Funders, social innovators, policy makers, coalitions, alliances, and nonprofit agencies are using DE to support the development of programs, generate innovations and take them scale, adapt effective principles of practice to local contexts, and facilitate rapid response in crisis situations.

Would developmental evaluation benefit your work? We're here to help you answer that question. We use an assessment tool to determine whether or not developmental evaluation is appropriate for your situation.

Together, we'll look at the developmental situation, the complexity of the problem, uncertainty about solutions, organizational culture, adaptive capacity, and readiness for developmental evaluation.

Please get in touch to talk more about this powerful tool. We offer complimentary one-hour consultations. Call 602-314-6460 or contact peter@flanagan-hyde.com.

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