

1. INTRODUCTION

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1.1.1 What is Program Evaluation?

The management of any organization, including a government department, involves four related tasks: planning; organizing; directing; and controlling.

The task of controlling, in turn, comprises several interrelated components. One of these which has been assuming given increasing importance in recent years is the carrying out of periodic in-depth evaluations of program efficiency and effectiveness. The principal characteristics that distinguish such "program evaluations" from the normal day-to-day monitoring of programs, and the on-going self-evaluation that is part of the management process, are as follows:

- a) they are conducted by individuals whose objectivity and impartiality in relation to a particular program is not open to question;
- b) they are more strategic than operational in nature, emphasizing fundamental questions of program effectiveness and alternative program design;
- c) they are generally broader in scope, and employ techniques and resources not usually available to individual managers;
- d) the prime "client" of the evaluation is senior management, frequently the Deputy Minister, rather than the line managers directly involved.

Program evaluation has been defined many different ways, but in a public context one of the most descriptive definitions may be as follows: "Evaluation is a periodic, independent and objective assessment of a program (product or service) to determine the adequacy and appropriateness of its objectives, its design, its results both intended and unintended, its rationale, its impact on the public, and its cost effectiveness as compared with alternative means of program delivery".

Program is an elastic concept. The term can apply to very large segments of a Department's operations (as in the program structure of the Estimates) or to specific components and sub-components of overall departmental activity.