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Evaluating the Evaluation Method:

A Retrospective on Embedded Evaluation



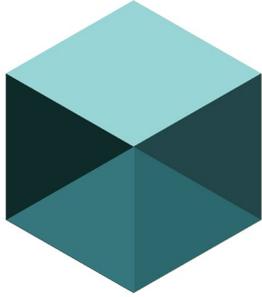
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Shannon Kahl, Liz Kelley,
Pace Goodman

Hello!

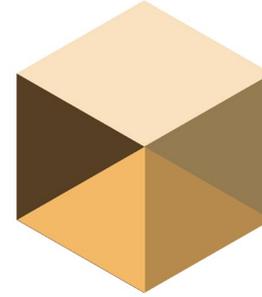
It's Nice to See You

What is Embedded Evaluation?



Embedded Evaluation

- Evaluation activities are integrated into ongoing program implementation to provide a continuous feedback loop to the program team.



Comprehensive Evaluation

- More traditional, or retrospective evaluation.
- Often requires at least nine months to design and execute.
- After all tasks are complete, the evaluation team then produces a final report.

Methodology

Embedded Evaluation Case Studies

Client Region	Program Type	Program Description	Evaluation Type	Evaluation Period
West	Pilot	Income-Qualified Home Retrofit	Process & Impact	2022 - Present
West	Pilot	Income-Qualified Building Electrification	Process & Impact	2022 - Present
Northeast	Program	Implementation of Language Access Plan	Process	2024 - Present
Southeast	Pilot	Income-Qualified Whole Home Retrofit, with a Pay-as-You-Save Model	Process & Impact	2020 – 2024
Northwest	Pilot	Income-Eligible Dual Fuel Heat Pump	Process	2024 - 2025

Embedded Evaluation Supports Pilots and Programs

- Data-driven program design changes
- Early insights
- Adequate time to resolve data access and availability issues
- Enabling successful evaluations
- Informing early decisions on pilot program next steps



Embedded Evaluation Challenges



- Slow recruitment
- Lower than anticipated enrollment
- Evolving program or pilot designs
- Data availability and access
- Program staff turnover
- Negative perceptions of evaluation and evaluators
- Unpredictable implementation timelines

Best Practices for Successful Embedded Evaluation

Consider the Approach

Shift Perspectives

Monitor Data Collection

Rethink Reporting

Create a Shared Understanding

Build Flexible Scopes and Budgets

Collaborate Regularly

Consider the Approach

Is the offering suitable for an embedded evaluation approach?

- **Embedded evaluation** is primarily used to **explore and inform new offerings** and implementation strategies and can be used on its own or within a comprehensive evaluation structure.
- **Comprehensive evaluation** may be the right approach for **established programs** and for more data driven programs. It might also offer more opportunities for streamlining evaluation costs.

Create a Shared Understanding

Does embedded evaluation mean the same thing to the utility, implementation contractor (IC), and evaluation teams?

- Take the time to explain the approach and **align roles and responsibilities** so that everyone involved has a **mutual understanding** of the approach and how it is intended to work to maximize the effectiveness.
- Revisit these steps with new team members.

Our teams learned to accommodate staff turnover and misconceptions about embedded evaluation during a multi-year embedded evaluation engagement.

Shift Perspectives

Adapt perspective from that of a researcher or evaluator to that of a consultant coming in to support successful program implementation.

- Evaluators might need to get more comfortable taking a **more consultative approach**- developing research questions and activities to address the changing needs of the program rather than sticking to a rigid evaluation plan designed around meeting confidence and precision targets.

Our teams had to start thinking less about assessing the program's success and more about how to help the program achieve success.

Build Flexible Scopes and Budgets

Develop flexible scopes of work and budgets to allow for changing evaluation needs.

- One of the benefits of embedded evaluation is the ability of the evaluation team to **investigate the most pressing research questions** to support successful program implementation.
- More open-ended scopes of work and budget flexibility can help accommodate this.

A common theme from the case studies was slow program ramp up and lower than anticipated participation which raised new research questions.

Monitor Data Collection

Is the program collecting the data necessary for the program and evaluation to be successful?

- Embedded evaluation provides an opportunity to **identify data needs and correct data collection issues** earlier in the program than a traditional retrospective evaluation.

In multiple cases, our team encountered instances where the implementer failed to collect the specified data and/or could not extract it from its systems and provide it to the evaluation team on a regular basis.

Collaborate Regularly

Collaborate through recurring meetings including the utility staff, IC staff, and evaluation vendors.

- Successful embedded evaluation requires **frequent and close collaboration** between evaluation and implementation.
- Regular meetings provide an opportunity for the evaluator to **identify program challenges** and proactively work with the program team to **prioritize research needs**

As our team found, regular meetings provide an opportunity to share findings, build trust, and integrate within the larger program team, making the evaluation more successful.

Rethink Reporting

Consider how and when findings and recommendations will be shared.

- Make recommendations actionable.
- Establish expectations for timing and focus of report reviews.
- Consider if any deliverables should be made public.

Misalignment of expectations regarding how and when evaluation findings and recommendations will be provided, and acted on, can lead to frustration on both sides.

Questions?

We've Got Answers



Shannon Kahl

Director

shannon@illumeadvising.com

Liz Kelley

Sr. Director

liz@illumeadvising.com

Pace Goodman

Sr. Director

pace@illumeadvising.com

Read our paper here!

