Evaluation
How are we doing?

It has become routine to build provision for evaluation into implementation plans for projects, campaigns and programs. Much money is spent to bring professional evaluators into the picture. Yet there is much confusion about what is really meant by "evaluation" and how to make good use of it. When the topic comes up, one needs first to ask several questions:

1.　**Why evaluate?** Is it mainly to record the **results** of our efforts? And/or are we interested mainly in **lessons learned** along the way?

processes?　　*results?*

More specifically, an evaluation exercise could do one or more of the following:
- Identify success and failure elements in the approaches that we are using.
- Get facts about costs, benefits, time needs, etc. to help plan similar projects elsewhere.
- Document results for future reference.
- Provide anecdotal information to help bring to life what is happening.

2.　**When to evaluate?**

　　At certain key milestones along the way?　　　　　At the end?
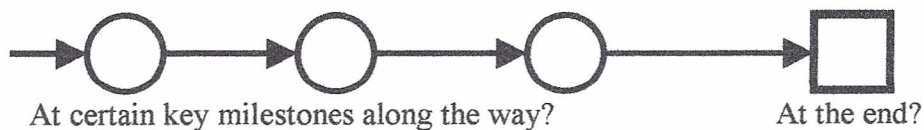
3.　**Who to do the evaluation?**
　　Project staff?　　　　Sponsor or parent agency?　　　　Outside professionals?

4.　**What information sources to use?**
　　Official project reports?　　　　　Published data?　　Special surveys? Site inspections?　　Public hearings?　　Case studies?

5.　**How much evaluation?**
　　After a point, there may be diminishing returns to more evaluation.
　　The evaluation time and funds might have higher payoffs spent in other ways.

Note: We are talking here about evaluation *after* a project has been designed and implemented. Sometimes the term "evaluation" is used also for benefit-cost analysis or other feasibility assessments be*fore* a decision to go ahead with a certain project or approach has been made.

For a related topic, see the Feedback item on this web site.