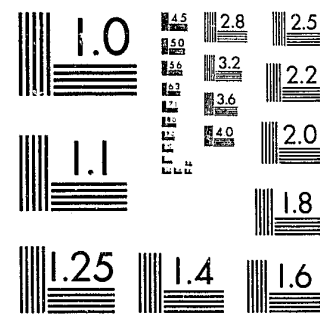


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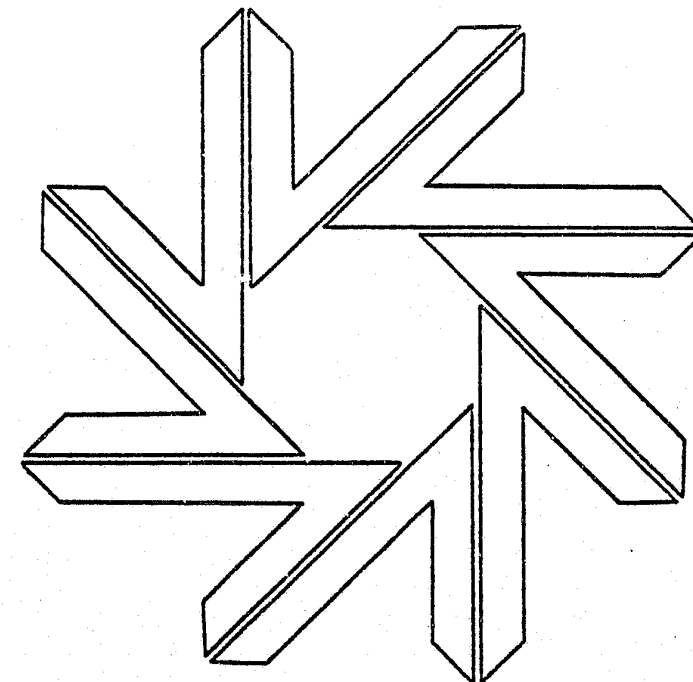
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INTRODUCTION TO PROGRAM EVALUATION A HANDBOOK



EVALUATION AND MONITORING UNIT
DIVISION OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION
VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
MARCH 1980

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

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PREFACE

The use of program evaluation in program development and operation is becoming more and more essential in this age of accountability. It is hoped that this Handbook will prove useful to administrators, managers and program personnel in their involvement in program evaluation efforts.

The Handbook was developed for the purpose of providing information concerning the process of program evaluation as it relates to the Department of Corrections. It also includes information about the program evaluation services available through the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit. This manual will be utilized for educational and training purposes, as well as functioning as an information document.

Acknowledgement is given to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Center for Advanced Studies in Human Services, for the development of the evaluation framework presented in this Handbook. This approach was developed specifically for use in the Criminal Justice field.

This author also appreciates the assistance given by the personnel of the Division of Program Development and Evaluation in their review and critique of the document.

Appreciation is also extended to the Word Processing Center for the layout and preparation of the Handbook and to Ms. Sharon Struble, Illustrator, Research and Reporting Unit, for the cover design.

Michael J. Sheridan
Evaluation Specialist
Evaluation and Monitoring Unit

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ACQUISITIONS

I. "EVALUATION: WHAT IS IT?"

According to Webster's dictionary, evaluation is a process of *"determining the significance or worth of, usually by careful appraisal and study"*. In other words, evaluation involves some type of assessment or judgment. Usually we think of the word judgment in a religious or judicial context. But evaluation is used in many more ways than this *"good or bad"* connotation. The process of evaluation is used every day of our lives, whether we realize it or not.

In the process of living, we evaluate or make judgments about what to wear, what to eat, where to go on vacation, which car to buy, etc. In this sense, evaluation involves such words as appropriate, useful, effective, timely, suitable, economical, and other terms that provide descriptive information.

The word information is important to the process of evaluation. A situation can be evaluated based on whim, hunch or gut-level feeling and the assessment may be accurate using these subjective methods. However, the more information that is available about a certain situation, the more objective and accurate the judgment will probably be. Since evaluations or judgments generally lead to decisions, it is preferable to have made the assessment utilizing the most pertinent information available.

In the field of Program Evaluation, where decisions are made that affect the lives of both receivers and providers of service, (as well as the life of the overall program itself), it is important that decisions be made on more than subjective hunches. Evaluation provides the information or tools necessary for making informed, objective decisions. Furthermore, decision-makers who utilize this more objective, informational process of evaluation stand a far better chance of explaining or defending their positions to those who need clarification or who question the action being implemented.

The Virginia Department of Corrections has a commitment of service to both the public-at-large and the persons entrusted to the Department's care. The positive application of program evaluation provides tangible and viable ingredients necessary for the attainment of this overall mission.

II. "EVALUATION: WHAT IT CAN AND CANNOT DO"

Evaluation can provide information on a variety of subject areas. In looking at a community correctional project - for example, a half-way house - evaluation can explore questions such as: *"What is our staff/client ratio and how does that compare to other half-way houses?" "How is our job development program working?" "Should we request money next year for additional staff or recreational equipment?" "What's more important to our clients, the G.E.D. program or group counseling?" "How many of our clients stay out of the correctional system after they leave here?" "What area of staff training should we be pursuing?"* Or, the favorite question, *"Generally speaking, how are we doing?"*

Evaluation can address these and other concerns and provide information that can be used to make programmatic and policy decisions. However, before the evaluation can begin, the half-way house administrators must answer some preliminary questions, such as the following:

(1) *"What is the purpose of this evaluation?"*

...Because my funding source requires it...because I want to make decisions about resource allocation...because I'm thinking of adding a program element in the near future...because I think I've got a pretty good program here and I'd like to document it. Any of these reasons and others are good evaluation purposes. Whatever the reason, the purpose needs to be identified and communicated to those involved in the evaluation process.

(2) *"What, specifically, is my question?"*

For example, in the question *"How is our job development program working"*, several concepts need to be concretely defined. Does *"working"* mean that a certain number of potential

employers have been identified within a certain time frame...or that these employers have actually hired a certain percentage of our clients...or that these clients have continued employment for a certain length of time...or that these clients have continued employment and have not returned to the correctional system...or what? And what is meant by *"job development program"*? The program in totality or parts of that program, such as recruitment, community contact, job placement, follow-up, etc? Whatever the question to be addressed, it must be phrased in concrete, measurable terms so that it is evident to all exactly what is being evaluated.

(3) *"Do we have the information needed to answer our identified question?"*

Remember, information is crucial to the evaluation process. Evaluation needs information in order to produce information. If the half-way house wants to know how many of its clients remain outside of the correctional system after they leave the program, but have no follow-up information system, then completely answering the original question will be difficult at best. If the information is currently lacking, the next step is to determine if it can be made available. Additionally, it must be determined if the information available is really the type of information that is needed to answer the identified question. Without the tools of evaluation - the necessary information or data - evaluation cannot take place.

(4) *"What is the stage of development of my program and how does that status affect my question?"*

Certain questions require that the program be in a certain stage in history in order to adequately address the topic. For example, it doesn't make sense to explore how a particular program activity is doing if all the staff members needed to perform that activity haven't been hired.

It also doesn't make sense to evaluate that program activity if it has only been operating for two weeks. It also doesn't make sense to try to substantiate the ultimate effects of that program activity on client functioning if there is no information available concerning functioning prior to the initiation of that activity. The timing of an evaluation process is crucial and the questions or concerns being addressed should be appropriate to the developmental stage of the program.

(5) *"What resources do we have for completing the evaluation?"*

This involves answering some basic questions, such as: *"How much time will it take to collect the data, analyze the findings and write up the report - and do we have that much time?"* *"Who will do what throughout the study?"* *"What outside assistance, such as computer services, will we need?"* *"How much is this evaluation process going to cost in terms of time, personnel and money?"*

These and other practical matters need to be addressed and resolved before the evaluation begins. Otherwise the possibility exists of reaching the deadline with people saying things like, *"But I thought you were going to do that!"* or *"But we don't have any money in our budget to pay for questionnaires."* Defining what is needed is absolutely essential to the completion of the evaluation tasks.

(6) *"What is the climate - programmatically, administratively, politically - in terms of acceptance of evaluation findings and acceptance of decisions stemming from the evaluation?"*

Evaluations should never be done if there is no real purpose in doing them. Evaluation

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is linked with decision-making, even if the final decision is to keep things as they are. If people are not ready, for whatever the reason, to seriously consider the evaluation findings, then the process is really a futile exercise and a waste of time, energy and money.

Evaluation can provide a wide variety of useful and meaningful information. However, the areas of purpose, specificity, information availability, timeliness, resources and climate must be addressed in order to insure that evaluation efforts really fulfill evaluation needs. Otherwise, evaluation results can end up on the shelf gathering dust - and decisions may continue to be based on speculation and subjective opinion.

III. "THE EVALUATION AND MONITORING UNIT: WHAT SERVICES CAN IT PROVIDE?"

The Evaluation and Monitoring Unit, a component of the Department's Division of Program Development and Evaluation, primarily offers two types of program evaluation services: (1) Evaluation services and (2) Technical Assistance services.

Evaluation Services

There are basically three types of evaluations that can be conducted on any program. Each evaluation type focuses the analysis on the linkages between two particular program components. Therefore, the components or parts of the program affect what kind of evaluation is possible and appropriate.

Program Components: All programs can be conceptualized as having four primary parts - inputs, activities, outputs and impacts.

Inputs

This term means all the ingredients or resources necessary for a program to operate. This includes such things as staff, facilities, supplies, equipment, money and the clients the program serves.

Activities

Activities refers to the actual work of the program - the operations that the program does. Depending on the nature of the program, this could be a variety of tasks; such as counseling services, security activities, training programs, outreach work, or even such basic tasks as hiring the staff or finding a facility in which to house the program.

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Outputs

Outputs refers to the actual effects of putting together the program Inputs with the program Activities. They are the end results that the program hopes to accomplish or has accomplished; those results over which the program has some control. If the program is client-focused, Outputs may mean such program accomplishments as the percentage of ex-offenders who secure employment as a result of the program, or the increase in a client's sense of self-esteem or responsibility. If the major focus of the program is to provide professional training, Outputs may be the number of correctional officers who received specialized training in the past year and some measure of change in knowledge, attitude or behavior in the officers as a result of the training. Whatever the focus of the program, Outputs refers to the actual products produced by the Program.

Impacts

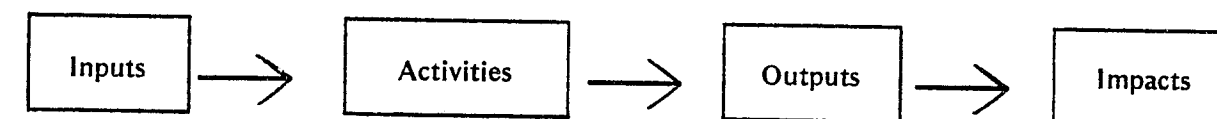
Impacts is similar to Outputs in that it, too, refers to end results, but on a different level. Impacts refers to the effects of the program on some larger system beyond the immediate program, such as the criminal justice system or the State of Virginia. Defining the targeted system that the program wants to ultimately affect is actually the first step in both program planning and program evaluation. It is possible for a program to achieve all of its objectives and yet have little impact on the larger targeted system.

For example, a program may indeed provide police training in stolen property identification, but the percentage of stolen items identified and returned to the owners may not be affected. In this case, the Inputs and Activities worked together to produce the desired Outputs or results - specially trained officers - but the larger law enforcement system was not really impacted by the program. (And certainly the training program could not be credited with a lower

incidence of burglaries, although there is sometimes a temptation to state such an unrealistic program objective.)

Often the ideology or goals of a program predict high level impact objectives such as "*reduction of crime*" or "*lowered recidivism*." Ultimately, programs can impact such larger global issues and evaluation can document these accomplishments, but evaluation often involves assessment at many relevant levels other than this larger systems' level.

These four components - Inputs, Activities, Outputs and Impacts - are all parts of what is meant by the term "*program*". They all build upon one another to produce the total picture.



Evaluation can mean exploration of any linkage between these four program parts and, depending on what parts and linkages are the focus of the study, the Evaluation Type may be different. The following paragraphs present a discussion of the three evaluation types and how they interface with the different components of a program.

Evaluation Types: The three evaluation types are Monitoring, Process Evaluation and Impact Assessment.

Monitoring

Monitoring is an assessment of the linkages between the Inputs and Activities of a program. It is primarily focused on the resources of a program and how those resources are being

utilized. It answers such questions as *"What is our staff/client ratio and does this ratio seem to be adequate for the performance of program activities?"* or *"How, exactly, does a probation officer spend his or her day and which activities take the most time?"* Monitoring information primarily describes a program and is useful in that this information can identify discrepancies or problems which may affect program progress.

For this reason, Monitoring can be an aid in program development. Monitoring information provides administrators and program managers with an indication of whether the program is actually doing what it was set up to do, during the early life of the program and throughout its development. For example, based on monitoring data, a decision can be made to hire more staff or revise job descriptions.

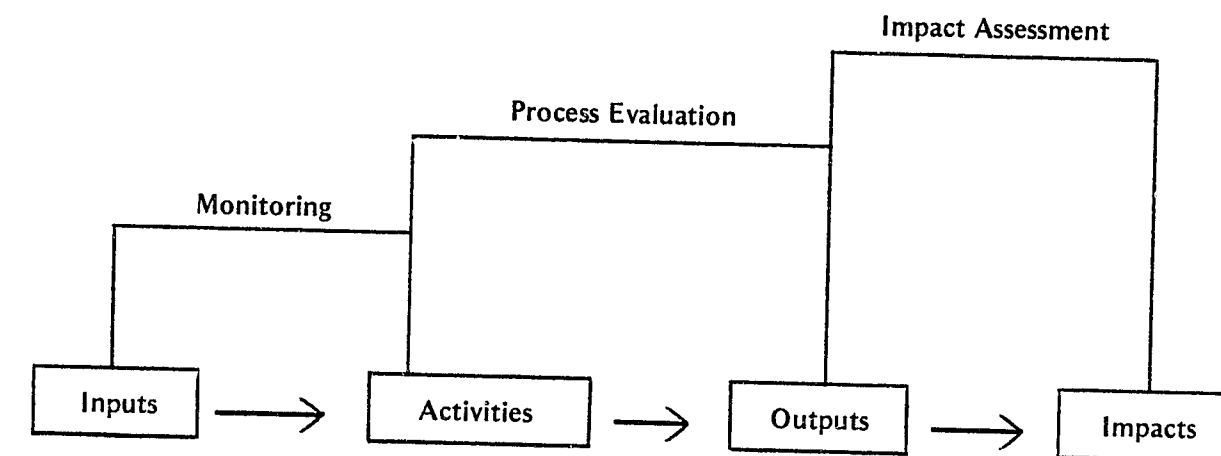
Process Evaluation

Process Evaluation is an exploration of the linkages between program Activities and Outputs. Overall program performance is assessed by a study of specific program activities and the link between these operations and specific program results. Therefore, Process Evaluation is an assessment of *"within-program"* performance, for it looks at changes stemming from particular activities and attempts to explain these program changes or results. Process Evaluation also provides information concerning whether actual outputs were those anticipated or whether there were unanticipated consequences of program efforts. Process Evaluation information is useful in decisions related to program modification, expansion or curtailment.

Impact Assessment

Impact Assessment is a study of the linkages between program Outputs and the related Impacts on some larger identified system. Impact Assessment basically answers the question, *"So what?"*, for it explores the ultimate effects of program efforts and attempts to provide support

for purporting some cause-effect relationship between program efforts and system changes. When Evaluation Types combine with Program Components, the picture looks like this:



The Evaluation and Monitoring Unit can provide services in all three types of evaluation efforts, either by directly conducting the evaluation or by assisting program personnel, administrators or policy-makers in performing the evaluation tasks. When the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit performs a basically consulting or training role, then this is known as Technical Assistance; the second service offered through the unit.

Technical Assistance Services

There are many steps in any evaluation. One must determine the evaluation climate, or the level of environmental acceptance of the study. The type of evaluation must be selected. The evaluation question must be identified and transformed into measurable statements. The evaluation design,

or game-plan, must be selected. The appropriate measures, or indicators of success, must be identified and the testing instruments secured. The overall workplan of what is going to be done, when, and by whom must be established. The actual evaluation information or data must be collected and analyzed, and the findings must be written and/or presented in some meaningful and understandable form. All of the steps and their sub-steps are essential in the evaluation process and the quality of the final evaluation depends on the quality of the performance of these steps. People sometimes need assistance in one or several of these tasks, and the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit is equipped to lend such assistance to personnel in the field who have undertaken the job of program evaluation.

Technical Assistance means what it implies; we will help you do what needs to be done, not do it for you. Often this type of service is ultimately the most worthwhile in that evaluation skills are spread throughout the Department, which should have some impact on the program evaluation efforts within the total correctional system.

In summary, the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit provides a wide variety of services in the areas of Evaluation and Technical Assistance. These are services that can and should be utilized in the achieving of the overall goal of effective and efficient program services throughout the Department of Corrections.

IV. "EVALUATION: NOW THAT I KNOW I WANT IT, HOW DO I GO ABOUT GETTING IT?"

Now that you know what is involved in the process of program evaluation and what evaluation services are available through the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit, how do you get started?

(1) The first step is to decide whether you want to request Evaluation or Technical Assistance services. If you want someone outside of the program to come in and conduct the evaluation, then you want Evaluation services. This doesn't mean that you won't be involved in the process, but it does mean that the major responsibility for the evaluation belongs to the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit evaluator, not the program personnel. If you want to conduct your own program evaluation, but need help in one or more steps of the evaluation process, then you want Technical Assistance services. In this case, the major responsibility for the evaluation belongs to you, but the staff of the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit will play some role in the process.

If you're not sure whether you want to be the major evaluator or the requestor of technical assistance services, then you should consult with the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit as to which role is the most feasible and appropriate, given the focus and type of evaluation being considered. (Some evaluations are better done "in-house", while others are more appropriately done by outside evaluators.)

Once the decision concerning role is defined - major evaluator or requestor of technical assistance - and communicated through written agreement, the evaluation process can begin. Regardless of the role performed by the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit and by the Program, the steps of the evaluation are the same. The difference is whether specific information is flowing from

the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit to the Program, or vice versa.

If the Program is the major evaluator, then the flow is primarily from the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit to the Program in the form of Technical Assistance. If the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit is the major evaluator, then the flow is from the Program to the Unit in the form of Program Information, or what the realities of the program are - such as the Program's view of objectives, activities, intended results, what the most workable data collection procedures would be, what the realistic standards of success are, etc. In either case, the Program personnel are the experts on the program and the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit staff are the experts on evaluation, and the information flow in both directions is an attempt to work together and share each other's area of expertise in order to produce a high quality and usable evaluation.

(2) The second step involves answering those preliminary questions discussed in Section II. This means addressing and resolving the issues of purpose of the evaluation, specificity of the evaluation question/s, availability of information required by the evaluation, timeliness in terms of the type of evaluation, resources needed for the evaluation tasks, and the programmatic, administrative and political climate surrounding the evaluation.

(3) The third step is to conceptualize the program into the components of Inputs, Activities, Outputs and Impacts. Completing this step is important for it concretely defines the program and helps the program and evaluation staff reach agreement as to what the program actually entails.

(4) The fourth step is to select the type of evaluation most appropriate for the evaluation focus; Monitoring, Process Evaluation or Impact Assessment.

(5) The fifth step is to determine the Key Events to be evaluated and identify the specific Indicators and Measures for Success. In other words, which program areas are going to be considered "*key*", what is going to be called "*success*", and how is it going to be measured? For

example, the job development component of a program has been determined to be a key event. Is this component going to be considered a success when 60%, 80% or 100% of all clients are employed? And is this going to be measured by self-report (the client saying, "*Yes, I have a job.*"), or by contacts with employers, or by data from check-stubs, or what?

There are several acceptable ways of determining key events and indicators and measures for success. Whatever the decision, the choice of key events and indicators and measurement tools must be determined and stated clearly by program personnel, prior to the collection of data.

(6) The sixth step is to develop a Work Plan. This means stating in very concrete terms who is going to do what, and by what date.

(7) The seventh step is to Collect the Data. This is the time to actually go out and conduct the interviews, pass out the questionnaires, do the case study, scan the existing records, or complete whatever collection procedures that have been determined.

(8) The eighth step is to Analyze the Data collected. If the data was reported in its original form (many, many numbers), it wouldn't mean very much to anyone who tried to read the report. Analyzing the data involves applying the appropriate statistical procedure to data in order to summarize this large collection of numbers into some meaningful form and, if possible, draw inferences or conclusions about the data collected.

(9) The ninth step is to Reveal the Findings to people who need or want to know the results of the evaluation. This can be through written reports, verbal and/or visual presentations, or through some other means that will get across the findings in an informative and meaningful way.

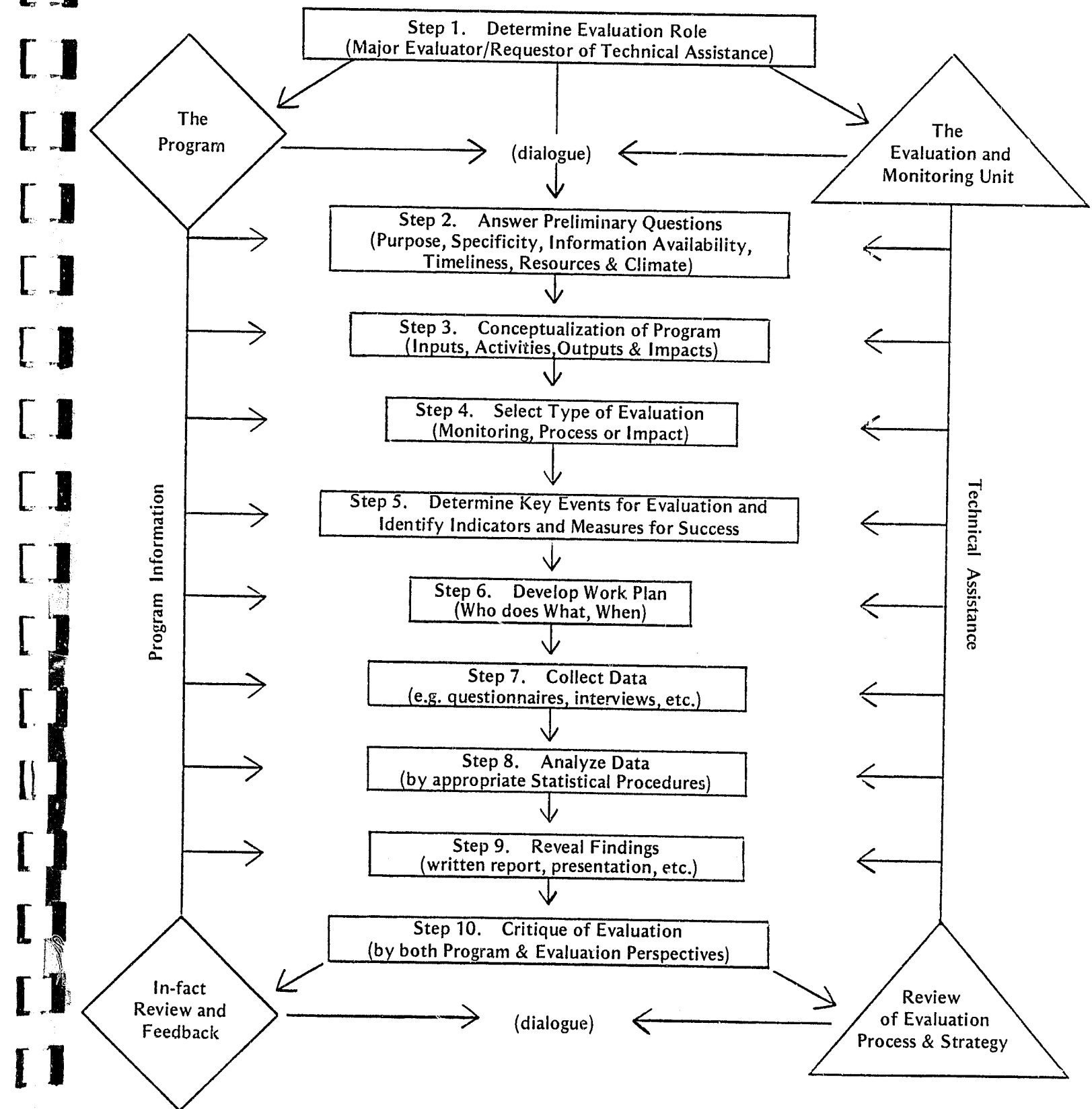
(10) The tenth step involves a Critique of the Evaluation Study and Process. Both

the Program personnel and the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit staff have unique and important perspectives to offer in this final step. The program critiques the evaluation through an "*in-fact review*", or a review of the evaluation in terms of how realistically the evaluation captured the program and its parts. The Evaluation and Monitoring Unit critiques the study from an evaluation viewpoint; a review of the process from the original evaluation focus to the completion of the evaluation steps. Both viewpoints are essential, for it is possible to have a very well done evaluation study from a theoretical and technical point of view and still have a study that did not really capture the essence of the program being evaluated. Conversely, the study may have a real grasp of the program, and yet commit fatal errors in the implementation of the evaluation itself that render the findings useless.

Beyond a review of the study itself, the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit also wants feedback concerning the delivery of the Evaluation or Technical Assistance services. The program staff will be asked to give their impressions of such things as clarity of presentation, responsiveness, reliability, cooperativeness, promptness, etc., on the part of the Evaluation personnel.

The following chart depicts the ten steps of the Evaluation Process discussed and illustrates the interplay between the Program information flow and the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit information flow, depending on which role is being performed by each.

PROGRAM EVALUATION FLOW CHART



V. "EVALUATION: A PARTNERSHIP"

It is evident that Program Evaluation is a process that involves many different people and perspectives other than just the identified evaluator. The provider and user of the evaluation services need to work as a team in order to achieve the desired results. In a study done on evaluation services, the number one factor that most affected whether the evaluation was seen as productive was the active involvement of the user in the evaluation process. The more active the participation and the more a sense of ownership of the study that was felt by the program being assessed, the more the evaluation findings were utilized in program decisions and the more positive the program personnel viewed the evaluation process.

These findings make sense from three perspectives. First, program personnel tend to have more investment in something to which they have provided input and energy. Second, by having the program staff's active participation in the study, the more capable the evaluation can be in terms of meeting the program's concerns and needs realistically. And third, by working as a team, the negative and counter-productive feelings of "*us*" versus "*them*" are diminished considerably, and this benefits everyone.

One of the primary goals of the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit is to provide relevant and useful program evaluation services to the various components of the Virginia Department of Corrections. This cannot be accomplished without direct communication and involvement with the Departmental personnel in the field. Good evaluation necessitates a partnership between user and provider, and with such a partnership, both evaluation and program service goals can be met.

END