

## Guidance on Program Evaluation

Program evaluations can closely resemble research and in some instances would require IRB review, while in other instances would not require IRB review. This guidance tries to help distinguish when IRB review is needed and when it is not. Researchers are encouraged to email the OIRB ([irbmaincampus@unm.edu](mailto:irbmaincampus@unm.edu)) with a description of the activity to help make decisions about whether an IRB submission is needed.

When the purpose of an evaluation is to test a new, modified, or previously untested intervention, service, or program to determine whether it is effective, the evaluation is research. The systematic comparison of standard or nonstandard interventions in an experimental-type design is research. In these cases, the knowledge gained is applicable beyond the individual, specific program. Thus, the purpose is to generate new knowledge or contribute to the knowledge in the scientific literature. Further, it is intended to apply the knowledge to other sites or populations.

When the purpose is to assess the success of an established program in achieving its objectives in a specific population and the information gained from the evaluation will be used to provide feedback to that program, the evaluation (referred to as program evaluation) is non-research. In the non-research scenario, the evaluation is used as a management tool to monitor and improve the program. The evaluation activity is often a component of the regular, ongoing program. Information learned from the evaluation has immediate benefit for the program or the clients receiving the services or interventions. Interventions and services that are evaluated are never experimental or new; they are known (either from empirical data or through consensus) to be effective.

Sometimes, the term "formative evaluation" is used to describe data collection activities that occur before the implementation of an intervention, service, or program. Whether the "formative evaluation" is research or non-research depends on its purpose. If the evaluation is conducted before implementing a new, modified, or previously untested intervention, the evaluation is part of the overall research project. If the evaluation is conducted to provide information on how to tailor a proven-effective intervention, service, or program in a specific setting or context, the evaluation is not research.