

IRB Guidance:  
Program Evaluation vs. Research

## Program Evaluation: When is it Research?

Researchers are often confused about the need for Institutional Review Board review of program evaluation projects. What is program evaluation? The Center for Disease Control defines it as the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future program development.

When questioning if your program evaluation project needs IRB review the researcher should make the following questions:

- ? Is the activity a routine operation in the setting? If yes, the activity is probably not research.
- ? Do the data gatherers have regular and routine contact with the data or the subject? If yes, the activity is probably not research.
- ? Does the activity alter the timing or frequency of standard procedures? If no, the activity is probably not research.
- ? Is the entity in which the activity is taking place paying for it? If yes, the activity is probably not research.
- ? Is the activity part of a research project? If yes, the activity probably is research.
- ? Is the goal of the program evaluation to test a hypothesis or answer a research question? If yes, the activity is probably not research.
- ? Will the activity benefit people or communities or entities other than those from whom the data are collected? If no, the activity is probably not research.
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