

Making Good Program Level Choices in Random Assignment Studies

Mary Myrick, APR
Public Strategies



PUBLIC STRATEGIES

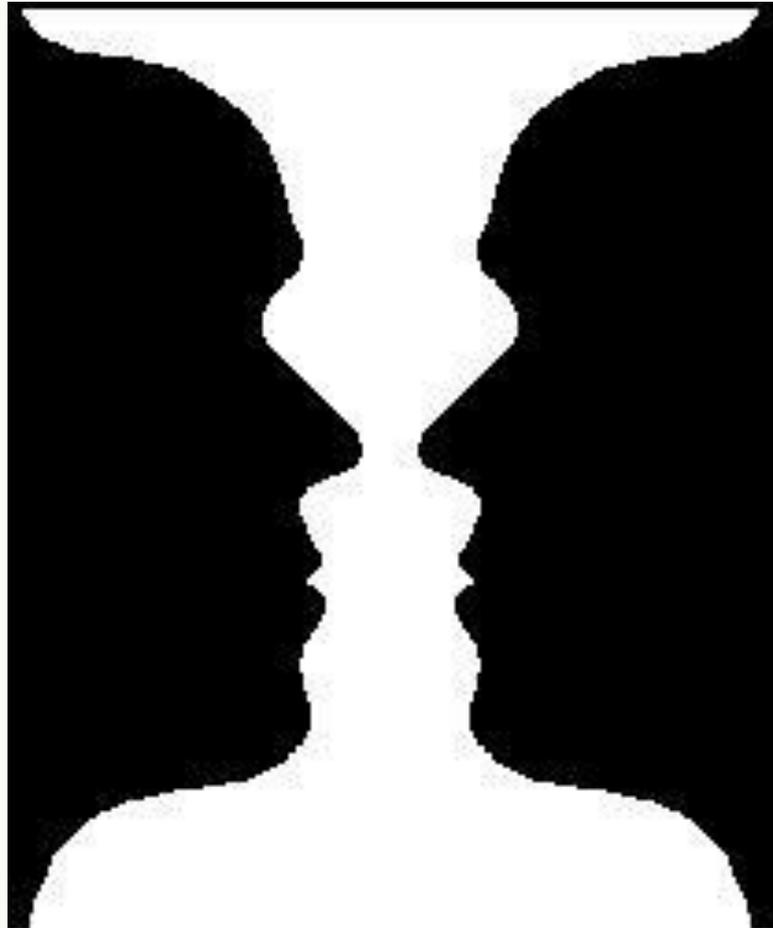
Let's Agree On What "Impacts" Are

Ultimately we all understand the meaning of "impact" when we talk about evaluations

- Did a program work?
- Were people changed?

But researchers and program staff SEE impacts differently.

Your Perspective Can Change What You See!



PUBLIC STRATEGIES

Programs See Impacts at the Individual Level

- Testimonials about a person who has been changed by the services offered
- 25 people are in the class today and I know each of them

Program Staff determine their success based on what happens for the people who receive their services. They gain confidence in the “impact” of their program because they see positive results every day in the lives of the people they serve.

Researchers See Impacts on a Collective Level

- They see all the people who are coming to your program.
- They see all the people who are in the program group that are not coming to your program.
- They see your program group as everyone who comes and doesn't come combined.
- They see the people in your control group that may or may not be getting a similar service somewhere else (or sometimes, unfortunately, from you!)

Researchers See Averages

- While as program managers you determine your success based on the people who participate in the program, your research team won't look much at that group at all. Instead, they will combine everyone who is randomly assigned to the program group, whether they come or not, and they will look at them together.
- That means that EVERY person who is in your program group that does not receive your services makes it harder for the research team to find your program's impact.

A Non-Research Example



PUBLIC STRATEGIES

Researchers See The Difference

- Your researcher will monitor what your program group does, but not because they will determine impacts from looking at your program group.
- They determine their impacts from looking at the difference between your program group as a whole and your control group as a whole.

Why Seeing Differences Matters to Policy Makers

Three programs are designed to lower rates of sexual initiation:

	Program	Control	Difference
Program A	30	30	0
Program B	40	50	10
Program C	50	70	20

Your Program Choices Impact Your Results Every Day

- Running a Great Program DOES NOT guarantee that your evaluator will find positive impacts but it gives you the best chance at success.
- Much of your success in your evaluation resides with you and in the choices you make.

Things You Can Do to Improve Your Evaluation: Participation Matters

1. Once in, ALWAYS in

- Recruit well, Engage well, Monitor well, Re-engage well
- Dose Matters
- Manage your control group enrollment well

2. ITT: This is a study of what happens when people sign up for your program, NOT a study of what happens when people receive your service

- The phone is going to ring

Too many programs find themselves at the end of random assignment looking back and saying, I wonder if my results would have been different if more people in the program group had gotten a full dose of my service.

Things You Can Do to Improve Your Evaluation: Data Management

- If it's not in the computer, it didn't happen.
- If it's not in the computer right, the evaluators will tell the wrong story about your program.
 1. Own the Responsibility for Your Data at the Highest Levels of Your Organization.
 2. Set Up Strong Data Protocols.
 3. Monitor Your Data for Accuracy.
 4. Develop Program Reports That Include Information About People Who Are NOT Getting the Service.

Things You Can Do To Improve Your Evaluation: Monitor For Quality

There is an old adage that says, “You can’t beat something with nothing,” so make your something count!

1. Monitor classrooms/program components for fidelity and quality.
2. Watch for waning participation and quickly intervene with solutions.
3. Monitor student mobility.

Things You Can Do to Improve Your Evaluation: Protect Your Controls

Your control group affects your success as much as what happens in your program group.

1. It's important to protect your controls by educating their leadership in the role they play.

2. It's important to really understand what services your controls are getting that mimic your services (core content in youth development is delivered in many vehicles: mentoring, character education, relationship education, etc.)

3. It's important that everyone around you understand the long-term value in protecting the control group.

So then there was my receptionist's son.....

Things You Can Do to Improve Your Evaluation: Have a Long View

There will be a day in the future when a research report will be released about your program.

- Impacts: Does your program work?
- Methodology: Is the research credible enough to allow you to make your claim?

1. Respect the agreements you have made with your evaluators.
2. Do not allow yourself to see individuals before Random Assignment .
3. Educate your partners and staff about the value of this evaluation for helping you improve what you do and to sustain your work for many years to come. Funders like to fund things that they KNOW work. (Tier 1 grants!)

Your Success Is In The Details

EVERY SINGLE DAY

EVERY CHOICE YOU MAKE
IMPACTS YOUR IMPACTS!!



ONCE

**IN THE PROGRAM OR
CONTROL GROUP**

ALWAYS

**IN THE PROGRAM OR
CONTROL GROUP**



PUBLIC STRATEGIES



— THE —
PHONE
IS GOING TO
RING



PUBLIC STRATEGIES



**IF IT'S
NOT IN THE
COMPUTER
IT
DIDN'T
HAPPEN**



PUBLIC STRATEGIES



**OUR
SUCCESS
IN OUR EVALUATION
DEPENDS ON THE
CHOICES
I MAKE TODAY**



PUBLIC STRATEGIES



BE A
DIFFERENCE
MAKER
TODAY



PUBLIC STRATEGIES

Thanks For Your Time Today!

I look forward to reading all of the research reports from your program evaluators. Please make sure they write an executive summary to accompany the very long report they will produce!