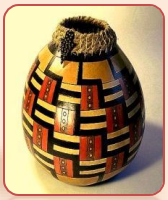

The Gourd of Wisdom Institute for Action Research & Development

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TGOW INSTITUTE'S RESEARCH CAPACITY

TGOW Institute for Action Research & Development is prepared to employ any of the four (4) more commonly used research designs in its work with social service agencies and grassroots organizations -- *exploration, description, explanation and evaluation*. The specific design and implementation of a research protocol is dependent upon the mission, goals and objectives of the organization, the time allotted for completion, as well as the specific programmatic activities it has selected as its priority.

* **Note:** A separate statement on TGOW's capacity to engage in "Action Research" is forthcoming!

1. **EXPLORATION**:

   Much of what qualifies as social science research is conducted to *explore a topic, an issue, or to establish an initial familiarity with a matter of concern*. This type of research is typical when a researcher is examining a new interest or when the subject of study is relatively new and unstudied. Exploratory studies are more typically done to:

   - To satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding of a particular topic;
   - To determine the feasibility of undertaking a more careful study; and/or
   - To identify, develop or select research techniques and a sense of direction for future research.

   The main shortcoming of exploratory studies is that they seldom provide satisfactory answers to research questions. They generally hint at the answers to critical questions we may have, but cannot provide definite answers because of lack of **representativeness.**

2. **DESCRIPTION:**

   A major purpose of many social scientific studies is to *offer a reliable description of situations and events*. The researcher observes and then describes what was observed. The chief goals of descriptive research are to provide an *accurate profile* of a group or situation, and/or to *describe a process, mechanism, or relationship.* Because of its methodology, scientific descriptions are more accurate and precise than casual descriptions. Examples of descriptive studies are:

   - U.S. Census - describes the demographic characteristics of the population of the United States;
   - A market researcher undertaking to describe people who use a certain product.

3. **EXPLANATION:**

   A researcher often wishes to know *why a certain event happened* as opposed to simply describing what happened. The degree of a relationship between two variables is of particular concern in explanatory studies. Explanatory research stresses the *determination of causes*. The following are examples of explanatory research:

   - Why did Americans vote for Obama in the last presidential elections?
   - Why do some cities have higher crime & arrest rates than others?
   - Why do some qualified teachers leave rural school districts?

4. EVALUATION:

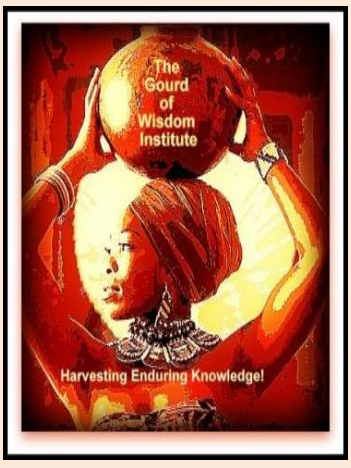
The researcher engages in the *systematic acquisition and assessment of information to provide useful feedback* about some object, including such matters as a program, project or staff operations. The generic goal of most evaluation research is to provide "useful feedback" to a variety of audiences including sponsors, donors, client-groups, administrators, staff, and other relevant constituencies. Most often, feedback is perceived as "useful" if it *aids in decision-making*. The most important basic distinction in evaluation types is that between *formative* and *summative* evaluation.

- **Formative evaluations** are designed to *strengthen or improve* the object being evaluated -- they help form it by examining the delivery of the program or technology, the quality of its implementation, and the assessment of the organizational context, personnel, procedures, inputs, and so on. Formative evaluations include several evaluation types:

  - ✓ ***Needs assessment*** determines who needs the program, how great the need is, and what might work to meet the need;
  - ✓ ***Evaluability assessment*** determines whether an evaluation is feasible and how stakeholders can help shape its usefulness;
  - ✓ ***Structured conceptualization*** helps stakeholders define the program or technology, the target population, and the possible outcomes;
  - ✓ ***Implementation evaluation*** monitors the fidelity of the program or technology delivery; and
  - ✓ ***Process evaluation*** investigates the process of delivering the program or technology, including alternative delivery procedures

- **Summative evaluations**, in contrast, examine the *effects or outcomes* of some object -- they summarize it by describing what happens subsequent to delivery of the program or technology; assessing whether the object can be said to have caused the outcome; determining the overall impact of the causal factor beyond only the immediate target outcomes; and, estimating the relative costs associated with the object. Summative evaluation can also be subdivided:

  - ✓ ***Outcome evaluations*** investigate whether the program or technology caused demonstrable effects on specifically defined target outcomes;
  - ✓ ***Impact evaluation*** is broader and assesses the overall or net effects -- intended or unintended -- of the program or technology as a whole;
  - ✓ ***Cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis*** address questions of efficiency by standardizing outcomes in terms of their dollar costs and values;
  - ✓ ***Secondary data analysis*** reexamines existing data to address new questions or use methods not previously employed; and
  - ✓ ***Meta-analysis*** integrates the outcome estimates from multiple studies to arrive at an overall or summary judgment on an evaluation question.



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