

Formative evaluation is generally any evaluation that takes place before or during a project's implementation with the aim of improving the project's design and performance.

Formative evaluation complements summative evaluation and is essential for trying to understand why a program works or doesn't, and what other factors (internal and external) are at work during a project's life.

Formative evaluation does require time and money and this may be a barrier to undertaking it, but it should be viewed as a valuable investment that improves the likelihood of achieving a successful outcome through better program design

Why Undertake a Formative Evaluation?

There are a number of good reasons to conduct a formative evaluation and we have outlined some of these below:

- Without formative evaluation, you may be embarking on a project that may not meet a real need, or one that may be constrained by external factors that you cannot control.
- Formative evaluation is especially important in community engagement and behaviour change projects as such interventions are often [complex](#) and therefore require careful monitoring of processes in order to respond to emergent properties and any unexpected outcomes.
- Forsaking formative evaluation may also mean that you are not able to observe and capture feedback that may improve the implementation of a project, and therefore its chance of successfully achieving the desired outcomes.
- Formative evaluation allows you to develop a better understanding of the process of change, and finding out what works, what doesn't, and why. This allows you to gather the knowledge to learn and improve future project designs and implementation.

Categories of formative evaluation

There are several categories of formative evaluation. Proactive and clarificative evaluations can also be referred to as *ex-ante* evaluations (meaning before the event).

Categories of formative evaluation

Proactive
Clarificative
Interactive
Monitoring

When	
Pre-project	Project development
Project implementation	
Project implementation	

Why

To understand or clarify the project
To make the project clearer
To improve the project
To change the project

Examples

[Literature Review](#)

[Stakeholder Analysis](#)

[Problem / Solution tree analysis](#)

[Logframe Matrix](#)

[Program Logic](#)

[Semi-structured Interview](#)

[Focus Group / ORID](#)

[Project Diary](#)

[Budget tracking](#)

[Time tracking](#)

[Questionnaire](#)

[Dartboard](#)

[Observation](#)

Formative evaluation often lends itself to qualitative methods of inquiry. The questions asked in formative evaluation are generally more open and lead to exploration of processes, both from the viewpoint of participants, but also from that of project staff and other stakeholders. The use of participatory evaluation is particularly relevant and appropriate to formative evaluation. Some of the approaches to consider in undertaking a formative evaluation are briefly outlined in this section.

It is considered good evaluation practice to include both formative and [summative](#) evaluation.