

It is Time to Reevaluate Your Gems: Elevating the Stakeholder in the General Evaluation Model (GEM)

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During the past decade, researchers, governments, non-profit organizations, and social entrepreneurs in many arenas have paid increased attention to designing evaluation systems that emphasize feedback from constituents (i.e., feedback loops) as a key method of data gathering evaluation data (Bonbright, Campbell, & Nguyen, 2009; Fund for Shared Insight, 2014).

A feedback loop can be defined as “the section of a control system that allows for feedback and self-correction and that adjusts its operation according to differences between the actual output and the desire output (American Heritage Dictionary, 2011).

Although evaluation feedback loops have existed since the beginning of formal program evaluation, for the majority of the 20th Century, educational program evaluation has not emphasized “systematically listening to beneficiary voice and ultimate constituent feedback loops” (Twersky, Buchanan, & Threfall, 2013).

But the field of educational evaluation is evolving, fueled by challenges from the private sector that spends \$25 billion a year on market research (Forti, 2012) and the international aid arena, non-profit leaders and funders are beginning to realize that it is time to elevate the role of constituents—the individuals, families, or communities they seek to benefit – in the evaluation process (Whittle, 2013, para. 2).

There are increasing calls for the use of constituent feedback to evaluate the outcomes of programs and major initiatives and to inform decision making. Data based on feedback of the people organizations are designed to help can be gathered as a part of a system that is, in itself, developed *with* constituent feedback. This data can then be used to understand, manage, and monitor program operations and track performance (Fund for Shared Insight, 2014).

Educators, program administrators, researchers and consultant evaluate thousands of programs each year using existing models that may or may not still serve their purposes as effectively as they once did.

At times it is valuable, even before deciding upon tried and true models of evaluation, and gathering data via these structures, to ask a more fundamental question, namely: “In what ways do existing structures provided by establish evaluation models need to be adjusted or updated to reflect current political or social realities?”

This presentation proposes that, given increased international attention on the vital role of stakeholder (constituent) participation in program evaluation and development, it is time to reconsider how established evaluation models may be updated to reflect realities. Specifically, the presentation will

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discuss the Modified General Evaluation Model, the updated version of the General Evaluation Model (McNeil, Newman, & Steinhauser, 2005).

Overview of GEM

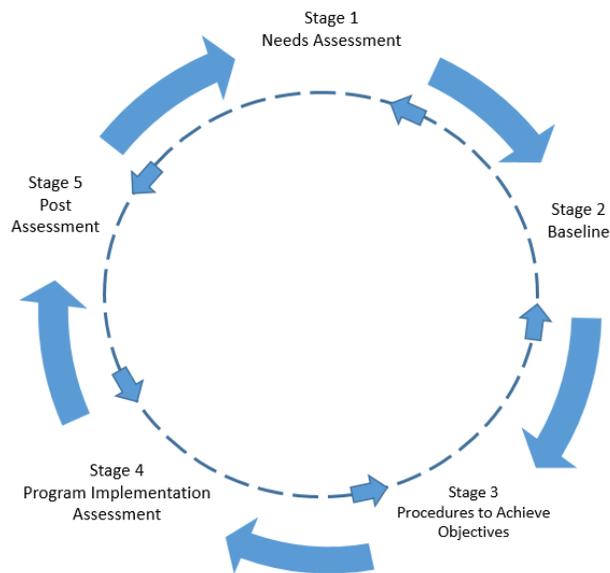
The General Evaluation Model (GEM) was originally developed by Newman, Vukovich, and Newman (1978) and was revised by Newman and Newman (1993) and by McNeil, Newman, & Steinhauser (2005).

Because it was developed as a generic model, “GEM is applicable to not only program evaluation but to all other levels of evaluation, from individual lesson plans and personnel evaluation to departmental evaluations and the evaluation of an entire insititution” (p. 89).

GEM is of value “in various content settings, as well as for both large-scale and small-scale evaluation” (p. 20). It can be used by in-house evaluators and program leaders, as well as by evaluators hired from outside of the organization.

GEM is composed of five stages that are expected to be completed in sequence, each stage providing information to the next, with the last stage of the model serving as a product for the year “as well as input for the next cycle’s program and evaluation” (p. 20). The five stages as proposed in the 2005 version of GEM are illustrated by Figure 1:

Figure 1: General Evaluation Model



McNeil, Newman, & Steinhauser, 2005

Figure 1: Arrows “moving” in a clockwise patterns indicate the primary direction of the flow of the evaluation from one stage to the next. Arrows on the dashed line (“moving” counter-clockwise) indicate feedback from one stage to a previous stage.

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Components of GEM

Stage 1: Needs assessment

The needs assessment is the process of collecting, from all stakeholders, information about the reason that the program is needed. This stage is comprised of six components, including identifying stakeholders and the aspects of the program that need to be evaluated. A program should not be implemented without this stage because information collected during this needs assessment drives the entire evaluation effort (McNeail, Newman, and Steinhauser, 2005, p. 28). A major goal of the needs assessment is to conduct feedback sessions with stakeholders to identify discrepancies between what the stakeholders want and the current stage of the program (if a program already exists). An important aspect of this stage, as originally conceived, is to obtain stakeholder buy-in.

Stage 2: Baseline

In this stage, the current status of the program and its participants are determined. This is done by collecting and analyzing baseline information by administering existing or new instruments. Comparison groups also must be identified, if warranted. The analysis is shared with stakeholders. Program objectives are also determined and shared with the stakeholders before they are finalized.

Stage 3: Procedures to Achieve Objectives

Once a finalized list of objectives have been developed during the end of the baseline stage, program planners must develop procedures to achieve those objectives, as well as determine the scope of the new program or addition to an existing program. Representatives from all relevant stakeholder groups should be involved in the develop of the program or program extension.

Stage 4: Program Implementation Assessment

Program implementation assessment is the determination of whether the procedures have been implemented as planned. The first task is to develop a plan to evaluate the implementation of the program. Collecting information on the context of the program and the timing and amount of program funds, hiring of staff, and training of staff is crucial.

Stage 5: Post assessment

The first task of the post assessment stage, like the stage before, is to develop the evaluation plan. The plan that must be developed in this stage, however, is focus on the effectiveness of the objectives. At this stage, one must compare performance to the results of the baseline assessments. The post assessment is conceptualized as input for the next round of program evaluation.

The Modified General Evaluation Model (MGEM): Suggestions for Change

MGEM is different from GEM in three major ways: First, there are three additional stages, which together represent an enhancement for the purpose of clarification and improving the model's usefulness. Second, all the titles of the stages have been converted from topics to action statements, and third the role of the stakeholders, while always a distinguishing feature of GEM, has been even more explicitly highlighted by its representation in the middle of the model, surrounded by each stage, and connected to each and every stage by double-headed arrows.

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While the GEM has five stages, the modified gem has eight stages (See Figure 2). Table 2 is a list of the two models side by side. All of the titles of the stages have been amended to include an action verb, which turns the title into an action stage as opposed to just having it be a topic.

Stages in MGEM

Stage 1: This stage is basically the same in both GEM and MGEM.

Stage 2: The MGEM stage two separates acceptance of the program needs assessment from the GEM Stage 1 because one clearly can conduct a program needs assessment in a vacuum, and neglect the key aspect of obtaining buy-in from internal and external stakeholders.

Stage 3: During this stage, a number of baseline tasks must be accomplished. The change in title indicates that baseline is not a stage, but a stage during which key tasks must be accomplished to establish a baseline against which program effectiveness will later be judged.

Stage 4: The MGEM Stage 4 emphasises the need to develop measurable objectives *and* procedures.

Stage 5: This is a key *new* stage in MGEM, one that clearly indicates that with a new or enhanced program, new procedures must be developed and implemented. Of course, as with all stages, with stakeholders involvement.

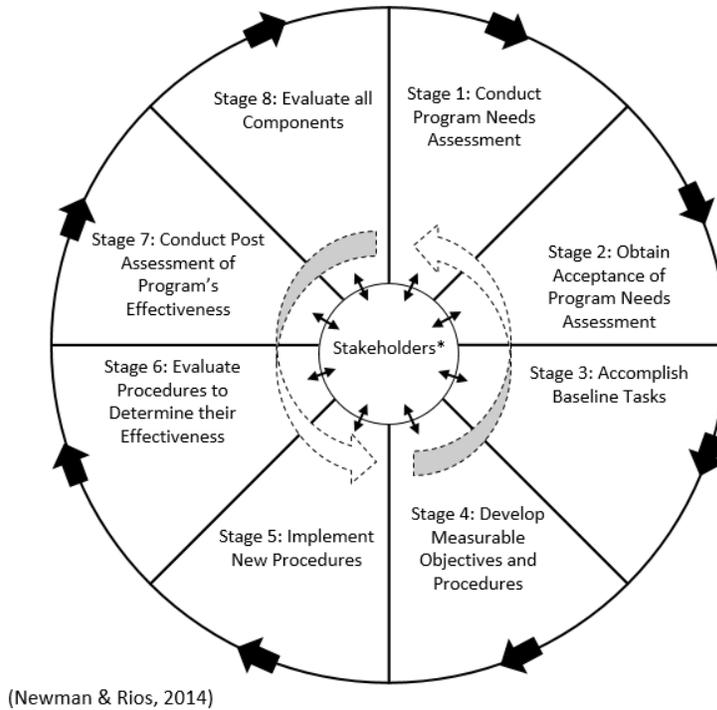
Stage 6: The key question at this stage is “Were the new procedures implemented with fidelity?”

Stage 7: To answer the key question at this stage, which is “Was the program effective?” results are measured against the baseline.

Stage 8: The title of Stage 8 includes the word “all” and includes the verb “evaluate” to indicate that reports and decisions about the effectiveness of the program as well as the implementation of the program is expected at this point. The next cycle of program evaluation must be based on decisions about all, not just some, components of the program.

In MGEM, the twisted twin arrows, moving counterclockwise, replace the arrows on GEM’s dashed line. Like their predecessor, the twisted arrows indicate feedback from one stage to a previous stage. These arrows, however, are purposely shown to cross multiple stages to reflect, more clearly, that feedback can be provided at any stage for *any* previous stage.

Figure 2: Modified General Evaluation Model



Stage	GEM Title	MGEM Title
1.	Needs Assessment	Conduct Program Needs Assessment
2.	Baseline	Obtain Acceptance of Program Needs Assessment
3.	Procedures to Achieve Objectives	Accomplish Baseline Tasks
4.	Program Implementation Assessment	Develop Measurable Objectives and Procedures for Achieving Objectives
5.	Post Assessment	Implement New Procedures
6.		Evaluate Procedures to Determine their Effectiveness
7.		Conduct Post Assessment of Program's Effectiveness while controlling for fidelity
8.		Evaluate All Components

Discussion and Implications: The Modified General Evaluation Model (MGEM) is proposed as an update of the General Evaluation Model. Like GEM, MGEM can be used for evaluations of all sizes and at all levels of an organization. The chief value of the MGEM is that it places the stakeholder literally in the middle of the model. It also clarifies the stages and, through the use of verbs in the title, provide a quick way for evaluators, the program leaders with whom they are working, as well as the many and varied stakeholders, to see and learn about what is supposed to happen at each stage. The increased clarity of the MGEM preserves the classic value of evaluation models, their power to “provide guidance for the sequencing of activities as well as [identify] the boundaries of those activities, while emphasizing the stakeholders that GEM always considered, ahead of its time.

The implications of the introduction of MGEM are that it not only improves the usefulness of the well-documented GEM, but in an era of accountability, it clarifies each stage and the overall applicability of

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GEM. The clearer the model, the more productive the model. Since the first iteration of GEM, its developers noted that one “special emphasis of GEM” is that “almost every stage requires the involvement of stakeholders” (McNeil, Newman, & Steinhauser, 2005, p. 22). By placing stakeholder MGEM elevates the role of stakeholders.

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