

Developmental Evaluation

Developmental Evaluation (DE) helps community organizations increase the impact of their work by providing real-time data and feedback to help them develop and adapt an intervention as it unfolds. It is particularly well-suited to initiatives that are being implemented in constantly and quickly changing contexts, and can be used by organizations and groups that are:

- Creating a new program, strategy or policy from scratch
- Adapting a model in constantly evolving contexts
- Replicating a model that emerged and is proven to work in one context, and adapting it to a new context
- Developing a rapid response in the face of a sudden major change or a crisis
- Trying to encourage major systems change

DE serves a different purpose than traditional forms of evaluation. In contrast to formative or summative evaluation, developmental evaluation supports the creation, development or radical adaptation of a model in real-time. This might mean:

- Documenting actions, short-term results and consequences of those actions, and their connections to the initiative's goals
- Identifying emerging processes and outcomes and making sense of their implications
- Determining when and if an initiative is ready for formative evaluation*

Groups using DE conduct a series of analyses to better understand how the initiative is being implemented, how well it is working, and how it should be adapted in real-time.

A Developmental Evaluation might use a range of different data-gathering techniques, such as interviews, surveys, or focus groups. Organizations typically work with an experienced internal or external developmental evaluator to customize the design of the evaluation to their particular situation. The evaluator then gathers data and provides feedback to implementers.

In determining whether to use DE, organizations should consider both whether their intervention is suited to DE, and whether the organization itself is ready to adopt DE. Both issues are covered in the [Innoweave DE self-assessment](#).

Content for this module has been developed by [SiG@Waterloo](#) and Here to There.

*adapted from Michael Patton's comprehensive book on DE - "Developmental Evaluation; Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use", pg 46