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Peer Review of Evaluation Studies

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Comments presented at a contractors workshop organized by Evaluation and Data Development, Human Resources Development Canada, and held at Chateau Laurier, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, May 28, 2003.

Outline

1. Characteristics of high quality studies
2. Peer review of a completed evaluation report
3. Evaluations involving an advisory panel
4. Performance based evaluation contracts
5. Lessons for research contractors

1. Characteristics of high quality studies

- Properly framed research question
- Appropriate sample with sufficient size
- Transparent estimation methodology
- Robust and reproducible results
- Relevance to policy issues
- Appropriate budget

2. Peer review of a completed evaluation report

Influence on the quality of the evaluation study

Authors informed of review in advance

Authors not informed review in advance

Interpret findings for government consumption

Adequacy of sample design

Results of data collection

Suitability of estimation methodology

Internal and external validity

Comparison to previous related findings

Relevance of results for policy

Guidance for improvement of study

3. Evaluations involving an advisory panel

Writing the solicitation for an evaluation study
Choosing the best technical and financial proposal
Refinement and implementation of the study design
Preliminary examination of data
Finalizing the estimation methodology
Assessing the potential and limitation of findings
Reviewing project reports
Repackaging findings of the evaluation study

4. Performance based evaluation contracts

Approved study design

Report on sampling (admin, survey, random)

Interim project report

Preliminary final report

Final report

Popularized summaries

5. Lessons for research contractors

Answer the question posed

Use samples that are sufficiently large

Fully exploit available administrative data

Keep estimators as simple as possible

Document the behavioral context of the evaluation

Translate evaluation results to the policy context

Keep study costs reasonable

Present findings in an accessible way

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