

Lab 2

Designing an Evaluation

Scenario

Your evaluation team has been given the task of developing several alternative evaluation-research designs for the purpose of assessing a priority objective at the Sommerville Health Plan (SHP) Medicaid program. Your project officer at the State has asked you to prepare a preliminary proposal that identifies key components of an evaluation design under different sets of assumptions.

One key objective was selected by your oversight committee at the State from the list that you presented to them last week. Your objective was modified somewhat by the group (as such committees are often wont to do). The stated objective that has been presented to you as the focus of your investigation is, for now, as follows:

Those individuals served by the SHP-Medicaid program will be provided 30% more ambulatory-based services than those Medicaid enrollees not served by the special SHP program. This increase will be assessed during the first year of the program.

The State is not yet clear as to the level of resources that will be committed to this evaluation project. Also, the status of the data systems that were expected to be available to you (as outlined in the scenario for the previous exercise) is not yet completely clear. Therefore, you must develop alternative approaches for addressing the above objective under three sets of assumptions:

1. No data are available for the year preceding the program for either the SHP-Medicaid group (the "intervention" group) or the Medicaid non-HMO group (the "comparison" group).
2. No data for any comparison groups will be available to you. That is, you only have access to data for the intervention group for the year before the program and for the first year of the program.
3. The data described to you previously will be available for both the intervention and comparison groups for the year preceding the program and for the first year in which the SHP program was operative.

You will be having two meetings with your project officer over the next several weeks. To meet this deadline you must complete one section of the preliminary proposal (which some call a "concept paper") during this lab session and a second section of this proposal during the next lab session (Lab 3).

Exercise: Designing an Evaluation

The first section of the concept paper must describe several components of your evaluation design. Your team must identify these items by the end of this lab session. The items that you must include in your proposal are as follows:

1. The key "variables of interest" to be incorporated in your investigation. These should include:
 - a. The major "**independent**" variable (i.e., causal variable),
 - b. The major "**dependent**" variable(s) (i.e., effect variables), and
 - c. Any major "**intervening**" or "**control**" variables (sometimes also called independent variables) that you think may be necessary to consider in assessing the relationship between variables you've listed in 1a and 1b, above.

(Hint - The main purpose of specifying a "control" variable here is to identify stratifiers potentially useful in developing your data collection approach.)

2. The **sources of the information** that you will use to develop the variables you have identified above under 1a, 1b, and 1c. List any concerns that you may have regarding the information available to this project from existing sources. If you have any concerns, list suggestions that you may have for special data collection efforts to obtain "new" items of information.
3. The exact delineation of any **intervention or comparison populations** and the **time frame** for analysis that you propose under each of the three alternative sets of assumptions listed above. You should include sampling considerations (if any).

(Hint - There are several possible "comparison" groups. Pick only one for discussion in this exercise. During the next lab session you may wish to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the alternative comparison groups.)

4. A **pictorial representation and name** for each of the three designs you have chosen, using Campbell and Stanley's notation and nomenclature.