

NCSALL Seminar Guide:

Establishing an Evidence-based Adult Education System

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National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) is a collaborative effort between the Harvard University Graduate School of Education and World Education. The University of Tennessee, Portland State University, and Rutgers University are NCSALL's partners. NCSALL is funded by the Educational Research and Development Centers Program, Award Number R309B60002, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

Introduction to the Seminar Guide

This Seminar guide was created by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). The guide is part of NCSALL's effort to help connect research and practice in the field of adult education and family literacy.

This Seminar Guide—Establishing an Evidence-based Adult Education System—is one of many teaching and training tools that NCSALL has developed. It is meant to accompany NCSALL's *Occasional Paper* entitled "Establishing an Evidence-based Adult Education System" (available at http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/research/op_comings3.pdf).

The purpose of the three-hour seminar is to help practitioners, program directors, state staff, and other policymakers read and discuss NCSALL's proposal (contained in the paper) for creating an evidence-based system for our field and then to understand and judge the relevance of such a system to their work in adult basic education.

The Seminar Guide is divided into the following parts:

- Preparing to Facilitate the Seminar
- Session Preparation: What To Have Ready
- Session Guide for Facilitating the Seminar
- Handouts, Readings, Recruitment Materials, and Background Information for the Facilitator

We welcome your comments and advice about this Seminar and about NCSALL. For more information about NCSALL's work, contact:

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Information About NCSALL

The Mission of NCSALL. NCSALL's purpose is to improve practice in educational programs that serve adults with limited literacy and English language skills, and those without a high school diploma. NCSALL is meeting this purpose through basic and applied research, dissemination of research findings, and leadership within the field of adult learning and literacy.

NCSALL is a collaborative effort among the Harvard Graduate School of Education, World Education, The Center for Literacy Studies at The University of Tennessee, Rutgers University, and Portland State University. NCSALL is funded by the U.S. Department of Education through its Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI).

NCSALL's Research Projects. The goal of NCSALL's research is to provide information that is used to improve practice in programs that offer adult basic education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and adult secondary education services. In pursuit of this goal, NCSALL has undertaken research projects in four areas: (1) learner motivation, (2) instructional practice and the teaching/learning interaction, (3) staff development, and (4) assessment.

Dissemination Initiative. NCSALL's dissemination initiative focuses on ensuring that practitioners, administrators, policymakers, and scholars of adult education can access, understand, judge, and use research findings. NCSALL publishes *Focus on Basics*, a quarterly magazine for practitioners; *Focus on Policy*, a twice-yearly magazine for policymakers; *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy*, an annual scholarly review of major issues, current research, and best practices; and *NCSALL Reports* and *Occasional Papers*, periodic publications of research reports and articles. NCSALL also sponsors the Connecting Practice, Policy, and Research Initiative, designed to help practitioners and policymakers apply findings from research in their instructional settings and programs. For more information about NCSALL's publications and activities, please visit our web site at:

[http:// ncsall.gse.harvard.edu](http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu)

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Preparing to Facilitate This Seminar

What's in This Guide?

This Guide includes all of the information and materials you will need to conduct the Seminar, including a step-by-step guide of the activities included in the session, the approximate time the activity should take, and notes and other ideas for conducting the activities. At the end of the session guide, you will find the handouts and reading for the Seminar, ready for photocopying.

Who Should Participate in This Seminar?

This Seminar is designed for any practitioner who works in adult education: teachers, program directors, state staff, counselors, or others. The design of the Seminar should be appropriate for practitioners with some experience in the field.

The Seminar is designed for approximately 8 to 15 participants. We don't recommend running the Seminar with fewer than five or more than 15 people, as discussions are harder to facilitate with too few or too many participants.

How Long Is the Seminar?

The Seminar is designed to be conducted over one 3-hour period. However, it could be divided into two 1.5 hour sessions on different days, if that is easier to implement within a program. If participants want follow-up after the last session, they can set that up during the last session.

How Do I Recruit Participants?

We predict that programs, coalitions, or state departments of education will use this Seminar in place of a regularly-scheduled meeting of participants: a statewide meeting of program directors, a program staff meeting, a coalition meeting.

However, if you would like to recruit a group of practitioners from different areas or programs to discuss the "Establishing an Evidence-based Adult Education System" paper, there's a sample recruitment flyer in Appendix C that provides information about this NCSALL Seminar. The flyer presents an overview of the topic and a brief description about what will be covered in the Seminar. It also includes a registration form for practitioners to mail back to you.

How Do I Prepare for the Seminar?

When you feel that you have solid commitments from the number of participants you are seeking, contact them to confirm their participation in the Seminar. **At this time, reconfirm the time, date, and location of the Seminar with the participants.**

To prepare, we suggest you send the following materials to the participants before the Seminar:

- **a copy of the *Establishing an Evidence-based Adult Education System* paper** can be downloaded and printed from NCSALL's Web site (http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/research/op_comings3.pdf) and photocopied, or ordered in bound, printed version from NCSALL by e-mailing us at ncsall@worlded.org or by phone at (617) 482-9485); and
- **a brief cover letter with information about the Seminar** to send to participants before the Seminar. (You will find the sample cover letter in Appendix C of this guide).

Participants should receive this packet at least 10 days before the first meeting of the Seminar. You, as the facilitator, will also want to read the paper so that you are ready for the first session and for questions that participants may have.

Be sure that you arrive early for the Seminar in order to set up the chairs in a circle; arrange your newsprint; and organize handouts, pens, tapes, etc. Consider having some sort of refreshment, such as juice, coffee, or water. Check out where the restrooms are so you can tell participants where they are located, and make sure the heating or cooling in the room is appropriate.

You may also want to have (or start during the meeting) a list of participants and their phone numbers or e-mail addresses so participants can contact one another after the Seminar. Also, bring two or three extra copies of the paper.

What Kind of Support Can I Expect?

For advice on facilitating the Seminar, if you want to talk the Seminar over beforehand with someone from NCSALL, you should feel free to contact us. We can be reached at:

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What If I Want to Change the Activities in the Guide?

Feel free. The Guide is intended to help first-time facilitators who want a lot of guidance. It is not intended to be a script that must be followed. If you have a different idea for how to do an activity, you should use it. To help you, we have offered alternative ideas for several of the activities.

What Should the Outcomes Be of the Seminar?

First and foremost, we hope that individual practitioners learn about evidence-based practice and come away with ideas for how it is relevant to their own classrooms and programs. Secondly, we hope that the group creates a plan for further work. The group might decide to:

- have a follow-up meeting to discuss how the concept of evidence-based practice can be applied in their programs or state,
- stay in touch and share ideas via e-mail,
- produce a summary of what they've learned – something practical – that can be shared with other practitioners or policymakers,
- develop a list of policy changes at the program or state level that would support the establishment of an evidence-based adult education system, or
- decide on some action to take in their program or state to learn more about or promote evidence-based practice.

Session Preparation



Newsprint (Prepare ahead of time)

- ___ Objectives and Agenda (p. 8)
- ___ Evidence-based practice is... (p. 9)
- ___ Elements of a Program Model (p. 10)
- ___ Goal: Using an evidence-based model for providing services to students (p. 11)
- ___ Some Next Steps (p. 11)



Handouts (Make copies for each participant)

- ___ Handout 1: Components of an EBAE System (Appendix A)
- ___ Handout 2: Elements of a Program Model (Appendix A)



Reading (Have two or three extra copies available for participants who forget to bring theirs)

- ___ *Establishing an Evidence-based Adult Education System* (NCSALL Occasional Paper)

Materials

- ___ Newsprint easel
- ___ Markers, pens, tape

Session Guide

Objectives:

Participants will:

- consider the definition of evidence-based practice and its relevance to their classrooms, program, state, and the field of adult education;
- discuss the components of an evidence-based adult education system, and the usefulness of baseline program models for their own work in adult education;
- consider next steps for supporting or being involved in the development of an evidence-based adult education system, at all levels.

Time: 3 hours

<i>10 minutes</i>	1.	Welcome and Introductions
<i>5 minutes</i>	2.	Objectives and Agenda
<i>25 minutes</i>	3.	The Definition of Evidence-based Practice
<i>25 minutes</i>	4.	Components of an Evidence-based Adult Education (EBAE) System
<i>15 minutes</i>		Break
<i>65 minutes</i>	5.	Elements of Baseline Program Models
<i>30 minutes</i>	6.	Next Steps for Supporting an EBAE System
<i>5 minutes</i>	7.	Evaluation of the Seminar

Steps

1. Welcome and Introductions (10 minutes)

- **Welcome participants** to the Seminar. **Introduce yourself** and state your role as facilitator. Explain how you came to facilitate this Seminar and who is sponsoring it.
- **Ask participants to introduce themselves briefly** (name, program, role). You could also ask them to very briefly add something more personal to their introduction, such as describing one aspect of their journey to this Seminar.
- **Make sure that participants know** where bathrooms are located, when the session will end, when the break will be, and any other “housekeeping” information.

Note to Facilitator

Since time is very tight, it's important to move participants along gently but firmly if they are exceeding their time limit for introductions.

2. Objectives and Agenda (5 minutes)

- **Post the Objectives and Agenda newsprint** and review with participants.

Objectives

- Consider the definition of evidence-based practice
- Discuss the components of an evidence-based adult education system and the usefulness of baseline program models
- Consider next steps for supporting or being involved in the development of an evidence-based adult education system

Agenda

1. Introduction, objectives, and agenda (Done!)
2. Discussion of Definition of evidence-based practice
3. Discussion of Components and baseline models
4. Planning next steps

3. The Definition of Evidence-Based Practice (25 minutes)

- **Introduce this session** by referring to pages 1-3 in the paper (*Establishing an Evidence-based Adult Education System*). The rationale for discussing the definition provided in the paper is that the term is relatively new to many in our field yet evidence-based practice (EBP) is being heavily promoted and programs may be required to demonstrate how their services for learners are based on evidence. The definition used in this paper is that used by the Assistant Secretary of Education, Grover Whitehurst.
- **Post newsprint** with the definition of EBP on it and a question for discussion:

Note to Facilitator
For more information about this definition, please see the Background Materials for Facilitator in Appendix D.

Evidence-based practice is:
...the integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction.

Question:
What does this definition mean to you, and, if adopted, what are the implications for your program?

- **Ask participants to discuss the question** (either in whole group if less than 5 participants, or in two or more small groups if group is more than 5) for 20 minutes. No need to write on newsprint; this is just a free-flowing discussion.

4. Components of an EBAE system (25 minutes)

- **Introduce this session** by referring to page 3 and page 12 in the paper (*Establishing an Evidence-based Adult Education System*). Building the system requires these three components and activities. It also requires program models for serving particular populations of learners (beginning level ESOL learners, GED learners, etc.). The next activity will help us discuss the components and the elements of a model.




Distribute Handout #1 (found in Appendix A). Ask participants to look at the diagram and discuss these two questions (20 minutes):

- ? What questions do you have about these components?
- ? What strikes you most about the role of research in developing the system?

Break (15 minutes)

5. Elements of Baseline Program Models (65 minutes)

-  **Distribute Handout #2 (found in Appendix A).** Ask participants to break into small groups (or, if less than 5 participants, stay in the whole group), and take 20 minutes to discuss the questions written on newsprint. **Give each group a copy of the same newsprint (with the questions),** and ask one of the participants of the small group to make notes on the bottom of their newsprint to share in a report-back with the larger group afterwards.

Elements of a Program Model

In your small group, discuss:

- What is the relevance of a model, containing principles for each of these elements, to your program(s)?
- Models for which populations of students would be most helpful to you?

Reconvene the whole group and ask each group to post their newsprints. Allow everyone time to read each others' newsprints. Ask a representative from each group to answer any questions from the other group about their discussion (15 minutes).

- **Facilitate a force field analysis** (30 minutes) among the whole group, focused on the supports and barriers to using an evidence-based program model. Post the following newsprint:

Note to Facilitator

A force field analysis is a discussion and strategizing technique where a group of people brainstorm hindering forces, supporting forces, and then strategize how to reduce hindrances and increase supports.

Write up the next steps on the newsprint as the participants mention them. After 10 minutes of brainstorming, ask participants to silently look at the options and decide on two that they think are priorities. Then, ask participants to come forward and write a “1” and a “2” next to the two options they think are most important to do next.

Another Idea

Ask participants to brainstorm ways in which their organization could integrate research into practice *and* policy.

- **Tally the results** and ask the group how it will move forward in implementing these steps.

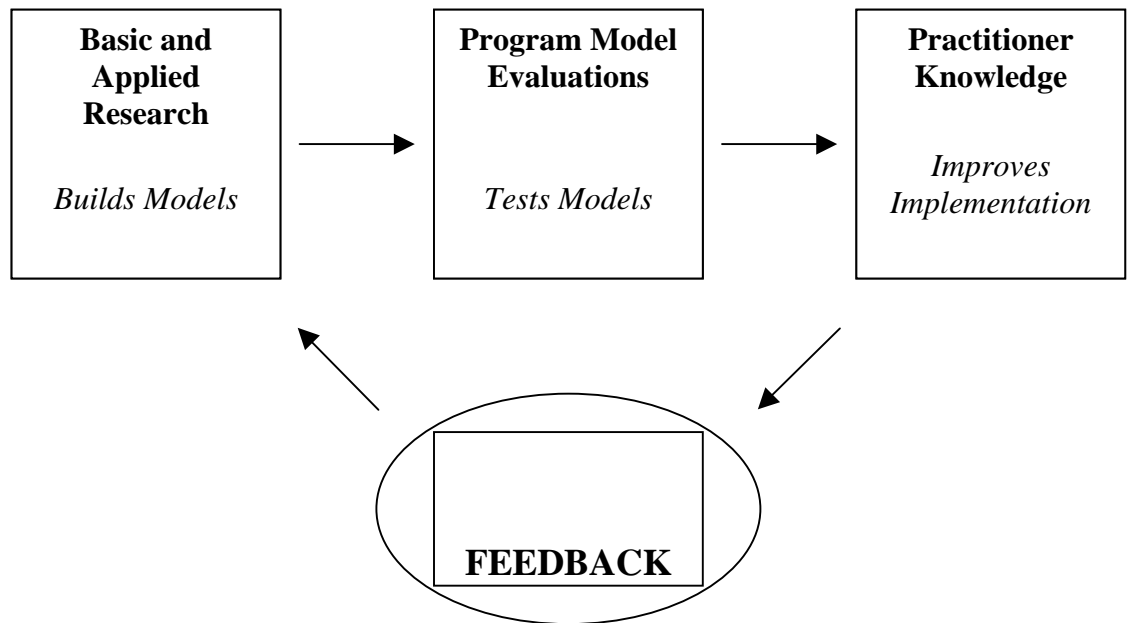
7. Evaluation of the Seminar (5 minutes)

- Ask participants to evaluate the usefulness of this Seminar in terms of each objectives (refer to the “Objectives” newsprint). How could these activities be improved?

Appendix A

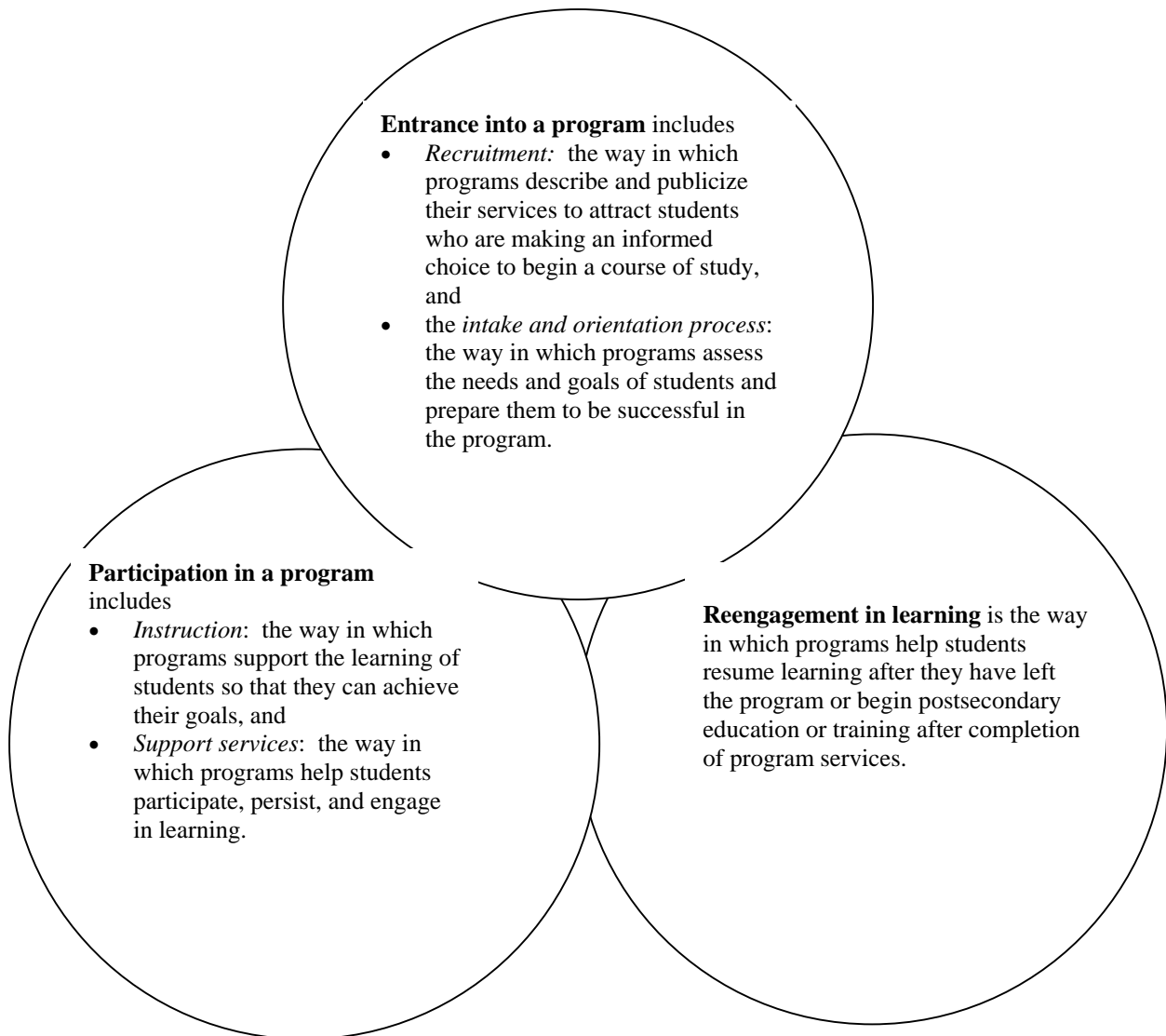
Handouts

Handout #1: Components of an EBAE System



Handout #2: Elements of a Program Model

A **program model** describes what adult students, teachers, counselors, administrators, volunteers, and program partners (such as businesses, unions, health centers and training programs) should do to provide effective instruction and support services.



A baseline program model would establish **principles** for program services. A principle describes a guiding assumption about how best to organize the activities of the three elements. These principles would be derived from empirical evidence and practitioner knowledge.

Appendix B

Reading

Establishing an Evidence-Based Adult Education System

by John Comings

(To be read by participants BEFORE the session.)

Download free from: http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/research/op_comings3.pdf
and reproduce.

Or go to <http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu>, click on “Publications,” then
“Occasional Papers – By Title,” then on “Establishing an Evidence-based
Adult Education System.”

OR to order bound, printed versions from NCSALL, e-mail us at
ncsall@worlded.org or call us at (617) 482-9485). The cost for mailing
printed copies is \$5.00 each.

Appendix C

Cover Letter and
Recruitment Flyer

Cover Letter

(Send to participants with the Reading about 10 days prior to the Seminar.)

DATE

Dear Colleague:

I am delighted that you are interested in participating in the 3-hour Seminar on *Establishing an Evidence-based Adult Education System*.

The Seminar will be held on (DAY, DATE AND TIME) at (LOCATION). Attached you will find the reading for the Seminar. **Please read this 20-page paper before the Seminar**; our discussion during the Seminar will be based on this paper. There will not be time during the Seminar to read the paper, so in consideration of your fellow participants and for the sake of a rich discussion, please read the paper beforehand.

If you have any questions about the Seminar or the reading, please contact me at (PHONE AND E-MAIL).

(INFO ABOUT PARKING)

(MAP, IF NECESSARY)

I will provide refreshments during the Seminar. I look forward to seeing you there and to a productive discussion about this important topics.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME

Recruitment Flyer

*Seminar
on
Evidence-based
Adult
Education
Systems*

Are you interested in discussing evidence-based systems for adult education?

The _____
(name of your agency or program)

is sponsoring a Seminar to engage practitioners, program directors, state staff, and other policymakers in reading and then discussing the proposal by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) for creating an evidence-based system for our field and then to understand and judge the relevance of such a system to their work in adult basic education.

The resource book for this Seminar is NCSALL's *Occasional Paper* entitled "Establishing an Evidence-based Adult Education System," written by NCSALL Director John Comings. As part of this Seminar, you will:

- Learn about a model for an evidence-based system for adult education.
- Discuss the components of an evidence-based adult education system, and the usefulness of baseline program models for your work in adult education.
- Consider strategies for supporting or being involved in the development of an evidence-based adult education system.
- Provide feedback and practical suggestions to NCSALL.

The Seminar will consist of one session of approximately three hours. You will be asked to read "Establishing an Evidence-based Adult Education System" before the session for discussion during the Seminar. There is space for up to 15 participants.

This is a staff development activity. CEUs or PDPs may be available. The date and location of the Seminar session are:

If you would like to join the Seminar, please complete this form and send it to: [Facilitator's name], NCSALL Practitioner Learner, [Facilitator's address] by [deadline]. I can also be reached at [Facilitator's phone number] and [Facilitator's email].

Name: _____ Position: _____

Home address: _____

Home phone: _____ Work phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Appendix D:

Background Materials for Facilitator

Why discuss evidence-based practice in education?

Increasing emphasis in all of education for instruction and services to be based on evidence; i.e., practice should be based on evidence, not on intuition, fads, or trial and error.

What counts as evidence-based practice?

Grover (Russ) Whitehurst (Asst. Secretary of Education, head of the Institute of Education Sciences) has said that evidence-based education is:

The integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction.”

What is professional wisdom?

The judgment that individuals acquire through experience. Professional wisdom includes expert opinion and practitioner knowledge.

What is empirical evidence?

Scientifically based research from fields such as psychology, sociology, economics, and neuroscience, and especially from research in educational settings.

Objective measures of performance used to compare, evaluate, and monitor progress.

Why are both professional wisdom and empirical evidence necessary for evidence-based practice?

Without professional wisdom, education cannot:

- adapt to local circumstances.
- operate intelligently in the many areas in which research evidence is absent or incomplete.

Without empirical evidence, education cannot:

- resolve competing approaches.
- generate cumulative knowledge.
- avoid fad, fancy, and personal bias.

Distinction between evidence-based practice and scientifically based research

Evidence-based practice: It’s about what should drive practice (using empirical evidence and professional wisdom to make decisions).

Scientifically based research: It’s about what type of research should generate the empirical evidence (research that, according to DOE, meets particular criteria: experimental design, peer-refereed journal, sample size and selection, etc.).

Empirical evidence

Research produces knowledge that can be used to design models of program service.

Evaluation tests models of program service to see if they work or to see which of two or more models works best.