

Conducting Your Own Research and Evaluation

WHAT IS RESEARCH AND EVALUATION?

Research and evaluation is the collection of information to create new knowledge and inform decision making. Constituting a variety of activities, research and evaluation ranges from conducting a short survey after a sports practice to working with a university partner to conduct a large-scale research project across an entire Program or multiple countries. Each activity adds its own value, and requires a different set of resources.

Research and evaluation has started to take on a larger role in nonprofit organizations. Funders frequently request evaluation to understand the impact of their contributions; research allows organizations to understand program needs, which enables them to provide better services for their constituents and to advocate for additional support from funders. While research and evaluation may seem daunting, with helpful resources and careful planning, it can be transformed into a tool that can benefit your Program.

WHY DO RESEARCH AND EVALUATION IN YOUR PROGRAM?



Evaluation allows you to better understand the impact of the work you are conducting in your Program, including how effective different activities are in creating desired change. Collecting this information provides the opportunity to modify activities that do not work, enhance activities that drive impact, and allocate resources more strategically.

Example: Surveys conducted after Family Health Forums give participants the opportunity to let the Program know how the forum can be improved and what health areas would be most useful to discuss in the future. This information allows Programs and Special Olympics International to better understand the needs of athletes and families.



TO PROVE

Today, an increasing amount of funders and partners are requesting concrete evidence of the impact of programs they are funding. **Evaluation allows these funders to understand your Program, who you are reaching, and how you are impacting them.** This helps funders and partners fully appreciate how their contribution has created an impact. Likewise, research may show partners additional needs of athletes and how future contributions can support services to meet those needs.

Example: Evaluations of the Unified Strategy in U.S. schools found that the program decreased bullying, created a more inclusive school environment, and improved the integration of students with disabilities in the school community. Moreover, as of 2014 the program has taken place in over 3,000 schools across 45 states.^{1,2,3} These results demonstrate not only who the program is reaching but that it is creating the desired impact.

For more information about the Unified Champion Schools evaluation, as well as to access a toolkit for evaluating the impact of Unified Champion Schools activities in your Program, please contact research@specialolympics.org.



TO ADVOCATE

Research and evaluation generates awareness of the needs of people with intellectual disabilities (ID), and can demonstrate their full potential when these needs are met. **This enhanced understanding brings accountability and can engage the public, institutions, and governments in implementing needed programs and policy changes.**

Example: Research demonstrating the efficacy of Unified Sports, its positive impact in the lives of people with ID, and the lack of similar opportunities can help shed light on the need for more integrated sporting opportunities for people with ID. An evaluation of Unified Sports participation found that 83% of athletes reported having more friends without ID⁴ and 98% of athletes improved in their respective sports⁵.

1 Center for Social Development and Education (2012). *Project UNIFY 2011-2012: Final Evaluation Report*. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston.

2 Center for Social Development and Education (2013). *Project UNIFY 2012-2013: Final Evaluation Report*. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston.

3 Center for Social Development and Education (2014). *Project UNIFY 2013-2014: Final Evaluation Report*. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston.