Overview of Evaluation Designs

**Type One: Non-Experimental Design**

In this type of design, changes within the target population are measured. There is no comparison group of non-participants in the design. Using this design type, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the results can be attributed to the program. However, this design is useful for obtaining information relating to service delivery, extent of reach of the intervention, and progress towards objectives.

**This design can be used...**
- To answer certain types of information. For example, questions about management issues relating to how the program, policy, or initiative is being implemented or whether risk is being managed, strategies for improvement;
- When no pre-program measures exist;
- Where there is no obvious control / comparison group available; and,
- Where practicality and costs are important considerations.

**How can this type of design be enhanced?**
- Using varied quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and sources of information (multiple lines of evidence).
- Ensuring the collection of “high-quality” data.

The post-test-only design and the pre-test/ post-test design are two common types of non-experimental design. However, both quasi-experimental and experimental designs involve some type of pre-test followed by a post-test. These designs are more resource intensive.

**Single group Post-test-only design**

In this design, beneficiaries/ clients of an intervention are measured after the intervention. Participants, for example, can be simply asked what the impact of the intervention was.

**Single group Pre-test/ post-test design**

This design uses before-and-after measures on a single group. For example, when measuring the impact of a training program a knowledge test may be administered before and after the training program to help assess the impact of the training.
**Type 2: Quasi-Experimental Designs**

The key distinction that separates experimental designs from non- or quasi-experimental designs is the random assignment of subjects into the intervention (treatment) groups and non-intervention (control) groups. Quasi-experimental designs involve comparison groups that are not randomly selected nor randomly assigned to the intervention. Efforts are usually made to match the comparison and the “treatment” groups as closely as possible according to a pre-determined set of characteristics.

Quasi-experiments require analysis techniques that are much more complicated than those for true experiments. High-level statistics (e.g., econometric models) are required to deal with the differences between groups and isolate the effect of the program.

**Type 3: Experimental Designs**

Random assignment of subjects to the intervention (i.e., treatment) and control groups helps ensure that subjects in the groups will be equal before the intervention is introduced. Although experimental designs are considered ideal for measuring impact, they are rarely practical.

Source: Treasury Board Secretariat, Program Evaluation Methods: Measurement and Attribution of Program Results