

International Association for Impact Assessment

Brandon W. Youker

[International Association for Impact Assessment \(IAIA\)](#) defines *impact assessment* as “the process of identifying the future consequences of current or proposed action.” “IAIA is a forum for advancing innovation, development and communication of best practice in impact assessment. Its international membership promotes development of local and global capacity for the application of environmental assessment in which sound science and full public participation provide a foundation for equitable and sustainable development.”

I. Impact Assessment and Its Relationship with Evaluation

IAIA is a “shadow” professional organization of AEA. Like AEA members, IAIA members are concerned with evaluation issues as they pertain to predicting long-term outcomes, particularly as it relates to the human environment. Below is a discussion of the relationship between impact assessment and evaluation from the perspective of a “traditional” evaluator.

Impact assessment, as defined by IAIA, is pertinent to evaluation; yet differences between the definition of “impact” by evaluation experts and impact assessment experts cause confusion. IAIA defines *impact assessment* as, “the process of identifying the future consequences of current or proposed action.” Conversely, *evaluation* most frequently refers to retrospective studies. In *Evaluation Methodology Basics: The Nuts and Bolts of Sound Evaluation* (2005), E. Jane Davidson defines *impact* as, “change or (sometimes) lack of change caused by the evaluand. This term is similar in meaning to the terms outcome and effect. This

term impact is often used to refer to long-term outcomes, (Davidson, 2005, p. 241).” The IAIA definition of *impact assessment* and the Davidson definition of *impact* at least seem to agree on long-term outcomes as a focus of assessing impact. However, the IAIA’s definition is inconsistent with that of the Evaluation Thesaurus (1991), which defines an *impact evaluation* as “an evaluation focused on outcomes or payoff rather than process, delivery or implementation evaluation, (Scriven, 1991, p. 190).” Scriven’s definition mentions nothing of long-term or future outcomes; rather, an impact evaluation is focused on actual outcomes and does not examine other program or policy components. It is clear that impact assessments would surely investigate beyond solely outcomes and also study the process and implementation of the planned intervention. Despite the confusion over the multiple meanings and uses for the term *impact*, several aspects of impact assessments are evaluative in nature and include evaluation-type tasks.

An impact assessment is a type of evaluation and may have utility for a certain evaluators. As the author previously reported, IAIA uses *impact assessment* to be the study, prediction, and evaluation of long-term outcomes. Therefore, an impact assessment is a process that determines the value of policies and programs in relation to future consequences. To elaborate further, impact assessments select relevant values and determine merit criteria in evaluating both the planned intervention and several alternative interventions to find the “best” (greatest benefit with least cost) potential intervention. IAIA’s description and definition of impact assessment leads the author to conclude that an impact assessment is in fact an evaluation. It is an evaluation of interventions (program/policy) and alternatives based on long-term or future outcomes.

Furthermore, impact assessments frequently incorporate evaluation methodology, use evaluation reports, and/or conduct (the typically defined) program and policy

evaluations. Evaluations may be particularly germane in developing monitoring and management systems for these outcomes.

Evaluation experts may find IAIA and impact assessments especially relevant if they have interest in studying the future outcomes of social; bio-physical; health; or policy, as it pertains to specific human activities. Methodology of impact assessments is beyond the scope of this paper, for additional information on impact assessment methodology, see the IAIA Website.

II. IAIA Members and activities

Introduction

IAIA was founded in 1980 aiming to provide an international forum for researchers, practitioners and others who utilize impact assessments. Its more than 2,500 members from 100 plus-countries include corporate planners and managers, public interest advocates, government planners and officials, private consultants and policy analysts, and university professors and students.

IAIA Partnerships and Interested US Agencies

IAIA has strategic partnerships formed with the Canadian International Development Agency, the Netherlands Association for Environmental Professionals, the World Bank, US Council on Environmental Quality, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, and various UN agencies.

Examples of other US federal agencies that may conduct social impact assessments or utilize its principles: US Bureau of Reclamation, US Forest Service, US Department of Transportation, US Environmental Protection Agency, and US Council on Environmental Quality.

IAIA Topical Sections

There are 11 sections of IAIA that provide more in depth coverage of a topical debate. The Sections of IAIA are biodiversity and ecology; environmental management systems; health impact assessment; integrated assessment of trade-related policies; indigenous peoples; strategic environmental assessment; local and regional government policy and impact assessment; disasters and conflicts; environmental legislation, institutions and policies; public participation; and social impact assessment.

Additional IAIA Activities

- Several topical listservs provide networking opportunities and dialogue regarding impact assessments for IAIA members.
- IAIA presents an annual conference and each year IAIA chooses a different global location. Additionally, it offers regional conferences, trainings, and professional exchange opportunities.
- An IAIA newsletter is published quarterly. It provides information regarding association activities and events, as well as professional news related to impact assessments.
- Quarterly, IAIA produces *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, a journal containing peer-reviewed research articles, professional practice ideas, article and book reviews, editorials, and a professional practice section. The journal focuses on the environment, social, health, technology assessment, sustainability, project appraisal, case studies, cost-benefit analysis, and other impact assessment-related material. The journal is only available to members of IAIA or vis-à-vis purchase.

- The IAIA Website offers “Key Citations” of background reference material related to the various areas of impact assessments. Environmental Impact Assessment’s index of Websites is a preliminary index of useful Internet sites used as a preliminary guide for environmental impact assessments.

References

Davidson, E.J. (2005). *Evaluation methodology basics: The nuts and bolts of sound evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

IAIA (2005). [International Association for Impact Assessment \(IAIA\)](http://www.iaia.org/) Website.
Available at <http://www.iaia.org/>

Scriven, M. (1991). *Evaluation thesaurus* (4th ed.). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.