Evaluation Policy Guide

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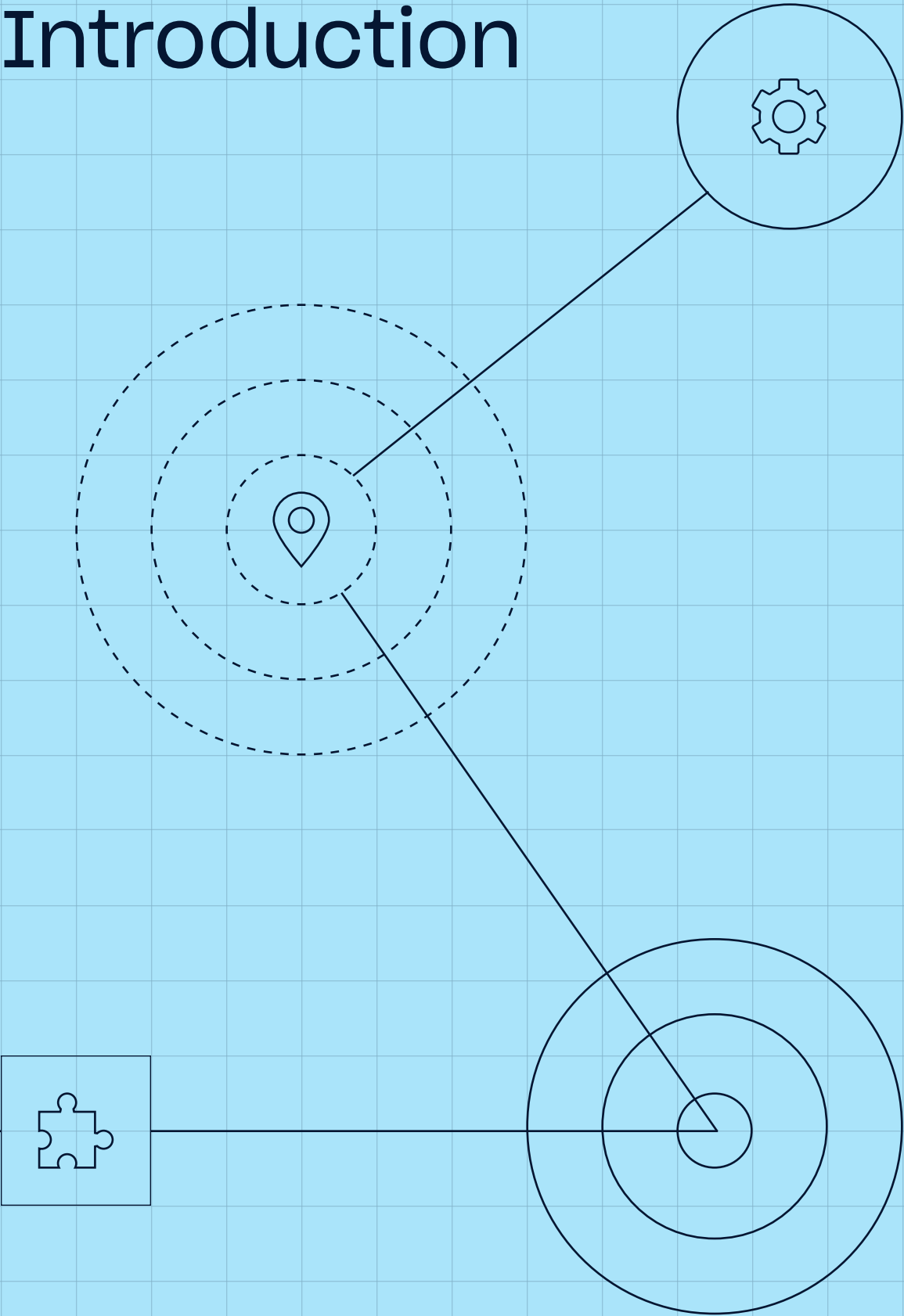Chapter 7

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Thank Yous

Introduction

Government policymakers face growing pressure to enact policies and fund programs that clearly work. They want to deliver on programs' stated goals, improving lives and communities. And in response to growing recognition of disparities in outcomes by race, ethnicity, gender and other characteristics, public agencies want to enact methods that ensure more equitable outcomes.

For all these reasons, many governments in recent years have embraced evidence-based policymaking and governance. In recognition of this — as well as governments' clearly voiced needs to center community voices and increase technical capacity for evaluation-related work — Results for America stepped up efforts to support public servants conducting evaluations and doing the hard work of driving equitable change.

This guide is one result of those efforts. Its purpose is twofold. First, it aims to help state, local and tribal governments develop an evaluation policy that prioritizes key principles including rigor, relevance, independence, transparency, ethics and equity. Second, it offers strategies, tools and frameworks for integrating the results of evaluations — evidence of effectiveness — into budget, policy and management decisions.

The overarching goal? For governments to know how to build evidence of what works and leverage that knowledge to power equitable outcomes. Think of it as a blueprint for building sustainable evidence-building and evaluation policies and practices

that prioritize equity. It encourages those in the trenches of policymaking and implementation to learn from peers across the country.

Governments are at different stages of their evaluation and evidence-based decision-making journeys. As such, this guide is designed to be used in multiple ways. An agency may use it to support the development of a new evaluation policy and new practices. A team may find it a valuable resource as they advocate for changes to existing evaluation practices and processes. And officials may find it expands their own knowledge as they design evaluations and make evidence-based decisions.

The guide's intended audience includes policymakers, program managers and other practitioners in government organizations who are ready to deepen their knowledge of evaluation- and evidence-related practices and performance management. Users should start at whichever chapter is most relevant given immediate needs.

The guide's eight chapters can be grouped into three sections:

Defining Evidence, Evaluation and Equity Chapters 1, 2 and 3 focus on defining evidence and equity, and how to integrate community input into evaluation practices to advance equity.

Developing an Evaluation Policy Chapters 4 and 5 offer guidance for both creating an evaluation policy and bringing it to life through formal adoption and change management.

Driving Change Chapters 6, 7 and 8 focus on the day-to-day work of leveraging evaluation opportunities, making evidence-based funding decisions, and building an organizational culture that values and supports all these activities.

Recognizing the wealth of existing materials published by governments, researchers and other expert organizations, a list of additional resources is offered to practitioners looking to deepen their knowledge. We encourage you to integrate this guide into engagements with researchers and use its tools and frameworks alongside workshops, intensive training sprints and other supportive measures offered by Results for America.

Chapter 1

Defining Evidence of Effectiveness
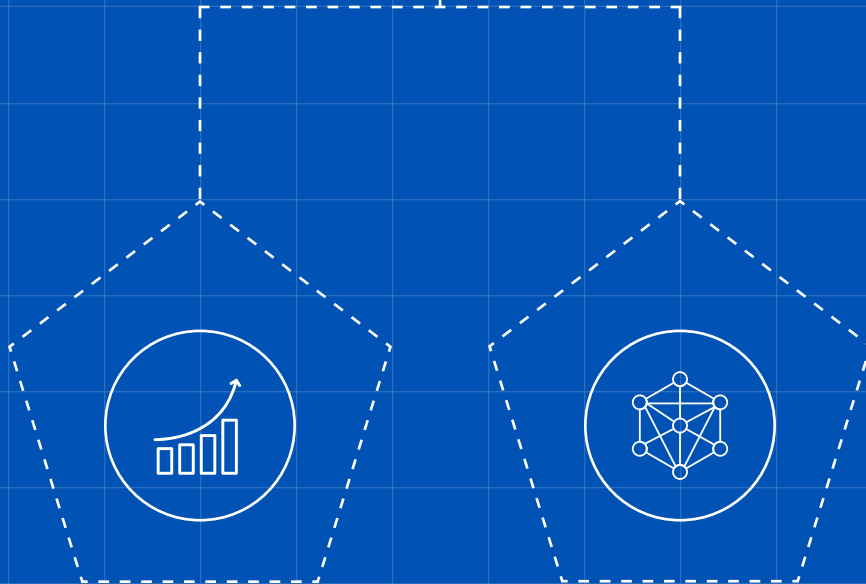
Why This Matters

If building evidence of effectiveness were easy, this guide wouldn't exist. The reality is there are dozens of factors that contribute to evaluation capabilities and readiness, and the ability of organizations to make data- and evidence-driven decisions. Some are relatively straightforward, such as the ability to collect and use data, and budgeting for evaluations. Others may be less obvious but are equally important — such as defining what constitutes evidence of effectiveness.

Evidence and Evaluation Framework

To aid government organizations in their efforts to build evidence and evaluation capabilities and a culture supporting them, Results for America created an evidence and evaluation framework spanning four capacity areas: Foundations, Policies & Practices, Leadership & Culture and Evaluation Planning.

The strategies and skills within each component in the framework build upon and reinforce each other. Together, they give teams the ability to know what works best to equitably improve outcomes for residents and communities.

As you work to build your organization's evaluation capabilities and culture, use this framework — which is the product of conversations with jurisdictions around the country and a review of best practices — to guide your work. Consider using it to identify which skills are already present in your organization and which are not. Also consider conducting a needs assessment to support this process — it can be difficult to move forward if you don't know where you are.[1]

Subsequent chapters of this guide focus on specific elements of the framework, including:

- **defining equity (**Chapter 2**)**

- **collecting community input (**Chapter 3**)**

- **establishing and implementing an evaluation policy (**Chapters 4 **and** 5**)**

- **getting internal buy-in (**Chapter 5**)**

- **leveraging evaluation opportunities (**Chapter 6**)**

- **making evidence-based funding decisions (**Chapter 7**)**

- **building a culture of evidence and evaluation (**Chapter 8**)**

The rest of this chapter focuses on defining evidence of effectiveness, an important step toward establishing an evaluation policy.

Existing Definitions of Evidence

For policymakers and those who deliver services to have a shared understanding of which interventions are "evidence-based," they must have a shared definition of evidence of effectiveness — of what works.

As your organization works to create its own definition of evidence of effectiveness, consider adopting or adapting an existing framework. There is no reason to start from scratch — many federal agencies and state governments have already adopted definitions.

North Carolina's Office of State Budget and Management, for example, defines evidence as "the available body of facts or information indicating how likely it is that a belief is true. Evidence can be qualitative or quantitative, and it may come from a variety of sources, with varying degrees of credibility."

Read on for other examples.

Federal Examples

U.S. Department of Education
The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes four levels of evidence, determined by study design, study results, negative findings from related studies, sample size and setting, and the match between study population and setting and the population and setting for implementation.

Evaluations: The Key to Understanding What Works

Evaluation: "An assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of one or more programs, policies, and organizations intended to assess their effectiveness and efficiency."[2]
— Office of Management and Budget

To build an understanding of which programs work for whom and under what circumstances, organizations must rigorously evaluate program effectiveness. Through a systematic analysis of high-quality quantitative or qualitative data, evaluations produce evidence of outcomes that is valuable in a number of important ways. Evidence of what works provides a foundational understanding of how to improve existing initiatives, enabling organizations to make evidence-based decisions that invest resources in proven programs.

More broadly, by building an understanding of what works and how, evaluations help to create equitable change at scale. It's important to note that there are multiple types of evaluations. To learn about impact evaluations and process evaluations, and how they differ, see Chapter 6.

U.S. Department of Treasury

Treasury's American Rescue Plan Reporting and Compliance Guidance defines three tiers of evidence: strong, moderate and preliminary. (See "Evidence Definition Spotlight" on p. 12 for details.)

AmeriCorps

The AmeriCorps State and National grant program uses four tiers of evidence (strong, moderate, preliminary and pre-preliminary evidence) based on study design, number of studies, and findings. It defines "evidence-based programs" that have "been rigorously evaluated and have demonstrated positive results for at least one key desired outcome. Rigorous evaluation means conducting at least one Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) or Quasi-Experimental Design (QED) evaluation of the same intervention described in the application."

U.S. Department of Labor

The Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research rates evidence for interventions based on study quality, number of studies and breadth of favorable findings from the studies. Rating categories are high, moderate, potentially promising and no rating.

State Examples

State government actions to support definitions of evidence of effectiveness include:

Minnesota

The state assigns evidence ratings to programs, based on impact evaluations. Ratings include "proven effective" and "promising," among others. "Proven effective" is defined as offering "a high level of research on effectiveness for at least one outcome of interest. This is determined through multiple qualifying evaluations outside of Minnesota or one or more qualifying local evaluation."

Colorado

In 2021, the state's legislature passed a bipartisan bill requiring consistent definitions of evidence-based programs in budget requests. The state has created an "evidence continuum" to establish standards for building evidence to assess whether programs work.

Tennessee

The state maintains a comprehensive program inventory of state-funded programs, assigning each to an "evidence step." The highest step is "strong evidence."

New Mexico

A state law requires that agencies prioritize "evidence-based" programs that are "demonstrated to be effective for the intended populations through scientifically based research, including statistically controlled evaluations or randomized trials."
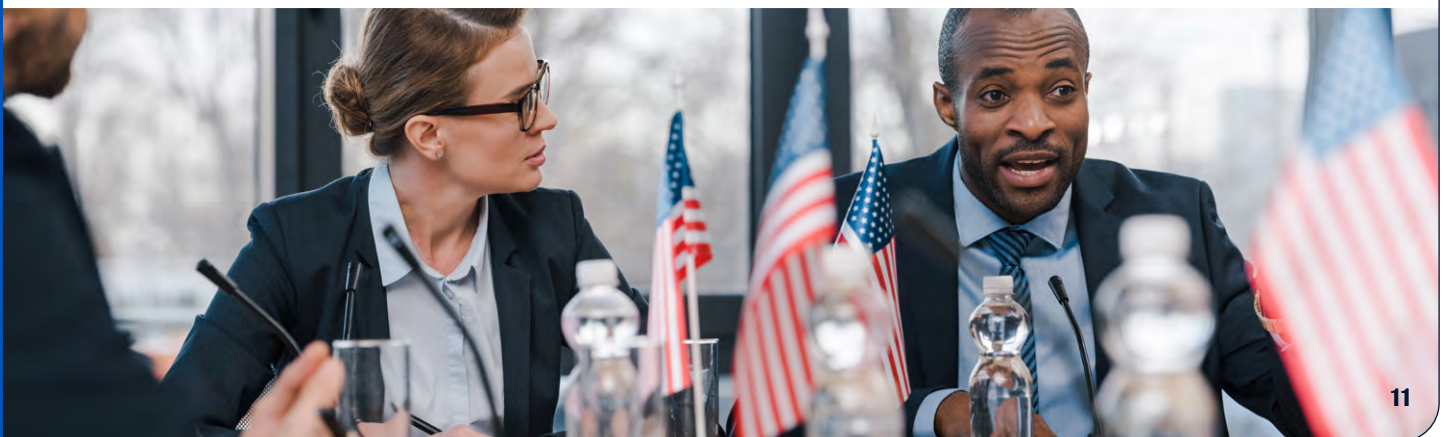
Evidence Definition Spotlight: U.S. Treasury Department

The American Rescue Plan Act established the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds ("SLFRF") program. As part of its reporting and compliance guidance for the program, the U.S. Treasury Department offered jurisdictions the following definitions of evidence, noting that to be designated "evidence-based," an intervention must have strong or moderate evidence.

- **Strong evidence** means that the evidence base can support causal conclusions for the specific program proposed by the applicant with the highest level of confidence. This consists of one or more well-designed and well-implemented experimental studies conducted on the proposed program with positive findings on one or more intended outcomes.

- **Moderate evidence** means that there is a reasonably developed evidence base that can support causal conclusions. The evidence base consists of one or more quasi-experimental studies with positive findings on one or more intended outcomes OR two or more non-experimental studies with positive findings on one or more intended outcomes. Examples of research that meet the standards include: well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental studies that compare outcomes between the group receiving the intervention and a matched comparison group (i.e., a similar population that does not receive the intervention).

- **Preliminary evidence** means that the evidence base can support conclusions about the program's contribution to observed outcomes. The evidence base consists of at least one non-experimental study. A study that demonstrates improvement in program beneficiaries over time on one or more intended outcomes OR an implementation (process evaluation) study used to learn about and improve program operations would constitute preliminary evidence. Examples of research that meet the standards include: (1) outcome studies that track program beneficiaries through a service pipeline and measure beneficiaries' responses at the end of the program; and (2) pre-and post-test research that determines whether beneficiaries have improved on an intended outcome.

Results for America's Definitions

Results for America's definitions of "evidence-based programs" and "evidence-building programs" are designed to help leaders steer taxpayer dollars to programs that will deliver better results for all. These definitions were developed in consultation with more than 80 stakeholders, including government officials, community advocates and practitioners, working in the field of evidence-based policymaking.

"Evidence-based program" means a program with either impact evidence or implementation evidence that is relevant and credible and has an informed rationale.

"Evidence-building program" means a program that has an informed rationale and is undergoing an impact evaluation or implementation evaluation that is relevant and credible.

"Impact evidence" means that the full body of evidence for a program shows that the program was very likely to have caused improvement on an important outcome in similar contexts and for similar populations, based on one of the following categories of evaluation findings:

- Category A: At least three well-designed and implemented quasi-experimental or experimental design studies from more than one site that show the program caused a statistically significant positive effect on an important outcome.

- Category B: One or two well-designed and implemented quasi-experimental or experimental design studies that show the program caused a statistically significant positive effect on an important outcome.

"Implementation evidence" means a program has one or more well-designed evaluations using quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods designs that indicate, in similar contexts and for similar populations, how well the program has been implemented, barriers that have been experienced during implementation, who the program has served, cost of implementing, who values the program, non-causal results associated with program implementation and/or other information that can be useful for program improvement and successful implementation in other settings.

"Informed rationale" means the reasoning (such as a theory of change, logic model or narrative description) behind why a program is likely to improve important outcomes in similar contexts and for similar populations, based on research and input from participants and relevant stakeholders.

Among other goals, these definitions are meant to elevate the importance of generating knowledge that focuses on why, how and for whom programs work, as well as encourage ongoing evaluation. Learn more here, including how Results for America's definitions can be used to accomplish different goals.

Exercise 1: Evidence Definition Workshop

To understand which policies and programs work and how, organizations need a shared understanding of what constitutes evidence of effectiveness. Even if your organization has adopted a definition of evidence, it is worth reviewing it periodically to ensure alignment with current best practices.

1. **Start by putting your organization's current definition of evidence on a whiteboard. If your organization doesn't have one, feel free to choose a definition adopted by another jurisdiction as a starting place. (See examples earlier in this chapter.)**

2. **Consider these questions, putting any thoughts and ideas in sticky notes below the definition:**

   - What do you like about the definition?

   - What are its limitations? (For example, does it differentiate between tiers of evidence strength such as "strong" or "moderate," or categories of evidence such as "impact" or "implementation"?

   - Does the definition make clear that evidence should be generated from formal evaluations of programs? Does it detail which types of evaluations are required or preferred?

3. **Draft a revised definition of evidence, based on comments and feedback gathered on the sticky notes. Circulate to relevant stakeholders in the organization to gather feedback.**

Defining Equity
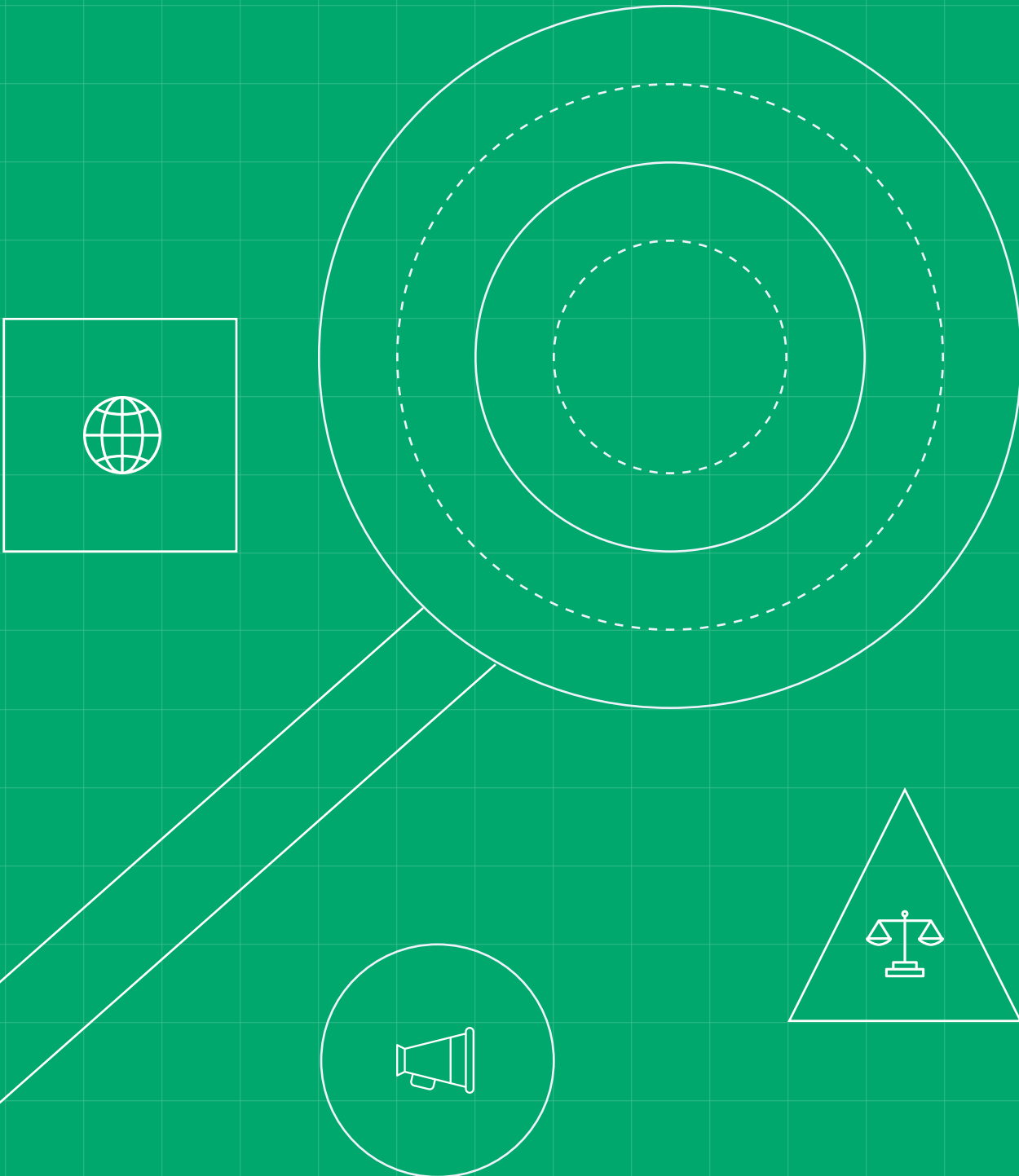
Why This Matters

A shared understanding of the word "equity" is valuable for multiple reasons. First, clarity on what the term means is important given its widespread use and frequent confusion with "equality." (See "Equity vs. Equality" on next page.) Defining "equity" also helps to:

- build understanding and alignment across a range of stakeholders;

- illuminate how underlying conditions can cause disparities in outcomes, even when everyone is treated equally;

- envision what success looks like; and

- achieve specific goals and outcomes, including what actions and data are needed to track progress

Establishing a definition signals that equity matters, in terms of policies, processes, evaluation practices and outcomes. That can make it easier to communicate a commitment to different forms of equity, including racial equity, gender equity and health equity, and coordinate work that results in meaningful change.

CONSIDER
Has your government or organization defined equity? If so, how is the definition currently being used?

Governments may define equity differently based on the context in which the definition is used. But equity always involves providing individuals and groups with fair access to resources, opportunity and power, while being mindful of the particular circumstances and systemic societal barriers they face.

The federal government has defined equity as "the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment..." For more on this and other definitions, see the "Equity Definitions in Practice" on p. 21 in this chapter.
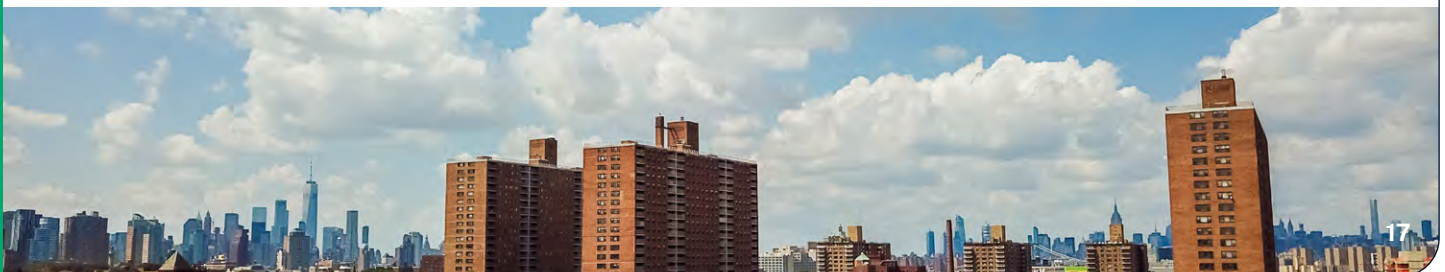
Equity vs. Equality

Equity and equality are not the same thing — and any organization trying to advance equity must understand the difference.

Equality means all communities and individuals have the same resources, irrespective of needs.

Equity means all communities and individuals have the resources they need to thrive.

Achieving equity involves consideration of historical and systemic barriers that have existed and continue to exist in society. Efforts to advance equity in government recognize that systemic, persistent differences in experiences and outcomes among racial and ethnic groups, as well across other dimensions such as gender, geography and income, cannot be solved by focusing on equality alone.[3] The following table further details differences between the concepts of equity and equality.[4]

	Equity	Equality
Guiding assumption	People can succeed when their specific needs are met. Social (including government) systems have been designed to benefit certain groups over others but can be corrected.	All people deserve the same treatment and access. This concept does not factor in historical and systemic barriers that impact groups differently.
Definition of success	A person's *outcomes* are not determined by their race, ethnicity, gender, income, ability or other subgroup or combination of subgroups.	A person's *access* is not determined by their race, ethnicity, gender, income, ability or other subgroup or combination of subgroups.
Policy example	Transportation budgets that reflect areas' specific needs for improved mobility.	Transportation budgets divided equally across a jurisdiction.

Equity Through — and in — Evaluation Practices

Evaluation is a critical tool for building knowledge and understanding of policies and programs meant to advance economic mobility and racial equity.

For example, a program designed to address an inequity may not actually do so in practice. By identifying policy or implementation shortcomings or failures as well as achievements, a well-designed evaluation can build evidence about what contributes to and dismantles inequities. It can also identify effective strategies for advancing equitable outcomes. In this way, equity is a targeted outcome that can be tracked and analyzed through evaluation. (See Chapter 6, Leveraging Evaluation Opportunities, to learn more about designing evaluations.)

CONSIDER
How might your government or organization define equity in order to distinguish it from equality? What are the implications in doing so for funding, program access, policy design and evaluation?

Equity can also be thought of as a lens through which to critically examine evaluation policy, practices and related decisions. As you establish an evaluation policy and subsequently build evidence through it, consider how an equity definition and equity principles should be embedded throughout the work.

Examining how equity shows up in evaluation practices is important because it helps ensure that:

- community-, policy- and practitioner-relevant research questions are being prioritized;

- evaluations are designed to produce knowledge about what works, for whom and under what circumstances, including knowledge beneficial to the people most impacted by the research;

- the data collected and analyzed are high-quality, use measures appropriate to the population and help answer the research questions being asked; and

- the evaluation results and interpretations reflect real-world experiences.

Common Obstacles to Centering Equity

Developing an evaluation policy and related practices that center equity is a journey with its own unique challenges. Below are common barriers to centering equity in evaluations and potential solutions to integrate into evaluation policies and practices.

CONSIDER
Has your government or organization recently conducted evaluations that examine outcomes from an equity perspective? Did you identify any historical or systemic barriers? Who else could or should be involved in the evaluation process to critically examine choices and decisions made? Have any findings been used to improve policies and programs?

Obstacle	Potential Solution
Data is not available or easily available for certain subpopulations.	Require and provide tools and support for data to be collected at subpopulation level where possible.
Data is not disaggregated by age, race, ethnicity, place/geography, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, ability and/or income.	Require and provide tools and support for data disaggregation where possible.
Evaluation activities prioritize certain outcomes, services or subgroups, thereby contributing to inequities.	Establish a shared definition of equity, and center it as a guiding evaluation policy principle.
Certain subpopulations are rarely reflected in evaluation findings, have been underserved by evaluation investments, and have been subject to harm as a result of evaluation.	Incorporate meaningful community participation in the evaluation process, including input about which questions to answer through evaluations. Investing in partnerships with key under-studied populations can facilitate robust community input.
Certain types of research methodologies are often undervalued by academia and funders as compared with practitioners.	Address the value of different research approaches in evaluation policy.

Research questions primarily reflect the interests of funders and researchers, rather than community members impacted by a policy or program.	Incorporate meaningful community participation and input into the evaluation process, including which questions to study.
Individuals in communities being studied rarely participate in the interpretation of evaluation results and often are not aware of findings.	Include community members in the interpretation phase and share results with communities studied.

Equity Definitions in Practice

Definitions of equity can vary depending on organizational context and public policy goals. But all are rooted in the idea of providing a person or group with fair access to resources and opportunities, while considering people's unique circumstances and society's historic and systemic barriers.

The examples below offer definitions from inside and outside of government, and they describe how they support policies and programs. As you read them, consider which equity definitions are most applicable to your context and how other governments or organizations that you work with define equity.

Federal Government
The term "equity" means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.[5]

How it is used: This definition of equity, part of a White House executive order from 2021, is used to align government-wide equity efforts and

has been adopted across federal departments and agencies, including for assessment, strategic planning, allocating federal resources and promoting equitable delivery of government benefits. White House Executive Order 13985 (and, subsequently, 14091) represents the first time a U.S. president affirmatively directed a whole-of-government approach to prioritizing equitable access to, and implementation of, federal programs and policies.

Dallas, Texas

The term "equity" means that each person has the resources and services necessary to thrive in each person's own unique identities, circumstances, and histories. Equity focuses on eliminating disparities while improving outcomes for all. Racial equity is a situation that is achieved when people are thriving and neither race nor ethnicity statistically dictates, determines, or predicts one's social outcome or ability to thrive.[6]

How it is used: Developed in response to City Council racial equity resolution no. 21-0503, this definition is part of Dallas' first-ever Racial Equity Plan, which establishes goals and actions to address the disparities that exist in Dallas. The definition is incorporated into Dallas' Budgeting for Equity Tool, which evaluates and scores each department's budget request according to its equity impacts and alignment with the Racial Equity Plan.

Long Beach, California

"Equity" is when everyone can reach their highest level of health and potential for a successful life, regardless of their background and identity. Equity is when everyone has what they need to be successful; equality is treating everyone the same.[7]

How it is used: This definition is part of Long Beach's Racial Equity and Reconciliation Initiative report, which details 107 recommended action items to advance racial equity. The report was developed in response to 13 listening sessions and four community town halls, beginning in June 2020. Long Beach City Council voted unanimously to approve the report, which serves as the foundation for City staff to develop implementation strategies for each recommendation.

PolicyLink

"Equity" is just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.[8]

How it is used: PolicyLink's [National Equity Atlas](#), produced in partnership with the Equity Research Institute at the University of Southern California, equips community leaders and policymakers with disaggregated equity indicators as well as policy solutions to inform their equity campaigns and initiatives.

Urban Sustainability Directors Network

The organization defines equity across four pillars:

- *Procedural equity: inclusive, accessible, authentic engagement and representation in processes to develop or implement sustainability programs and policies.*

- *Distributional equity: sustainability programs and policies result in fair distributions of benefits and burdens across all segments of a community, prioritizing those with highest need.*

- *Structural equity: sustainability decision-makers institutionalize accountability; decisions are made with a recognition of the historical, cultural, and institutional dynamics and structures that have routinely advantaged privileged groups in society and resulted in chronic, cumulative disadvantage for subordinated groups.*

- *Transgenerational equity: sustainability decisions consider generational impacts and don't result in unfair burdens on future generations.[9]*

How it is used: The Urban Sustainability Directors Network's [Equity in Sustainability](#) report shares good practices taking place across local governments to embed equity more fully in sustainability efforts. The report also provides recommendations for other local governments who seek to increase the impact of sustainability efforts by strengthening equity actions.

Exercise 2: 10 Questions to Center Equity

Designing an evaluation that centers equity requires thoughtful attention to power dynamics, community needs and interests, and potential benefits and harms. The following questions address all stages of the evaluation process — design, execution, analysis and communication and use of findings.[10]

As you answer the questions, consider whether equity principles have informed work to date, and if there are opportunities to embed equity principles and goals in evaluation processes and activities going forward.

1. **Who is designing the evaluation?**

2. **Which research questions are being asked and prioritized?**

3. **Does the project have potential environmental, economic, safety and/or health impact in the community? How might these differ across groups?**

4. **Are certain historically underserved communities more or less supportive of the project? Why?**

5. **How might community involvement in development of the evaluation help it focus on what is important to communities affected by the project?**

6. **What data is collected and from whom?**

7. **Who interprets evaluation findings?**

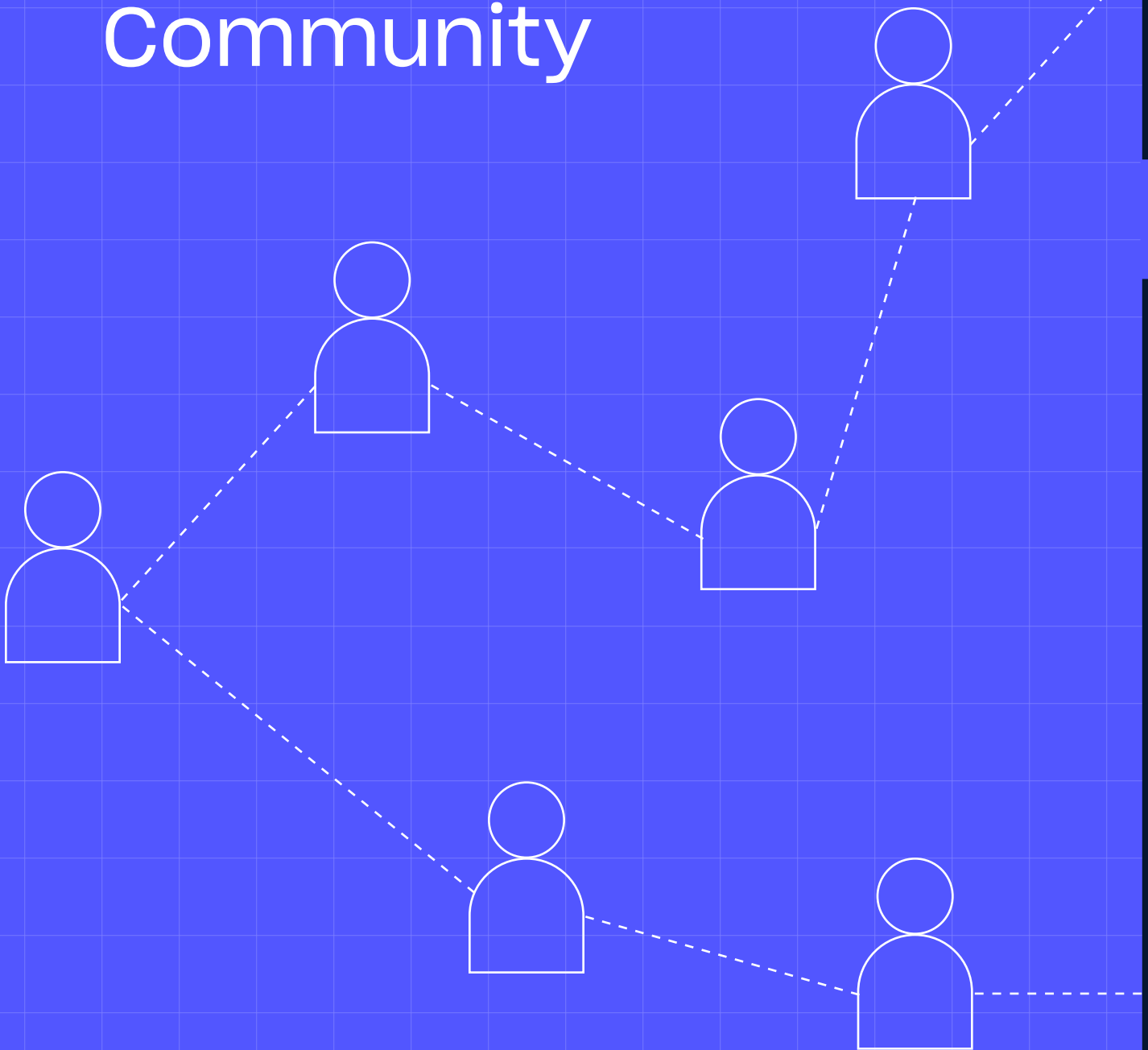8. **Who is informed about evaluation findings?**

9. **How are evaluation findings being used and for what purposes? Is there a potential for harm?**

10. **How can the evaluation inform the government's budget and investment decisions related to equitable outcomes?**

Chapter 3

The Power of Incorporating Community

Why This Matters

A cornerstone of a successful evaluation process is the community's participation in that evaluation. The reason is simple: To be effective, an evaluation must incorporate the challenges that affect the people the program is designed to serve. Community engagement ensures that an evaluation is grounded in lived realities and that its findings are both relevant and actionable.

Affected community members can provide insights and questions not readily apparent to evaluators, offering nuanced perspectives on real-life impacts, inequities and opportunities for improvement. Involving community members in the evaluation process can also increase the credibility and acceptance of the evaluation findings.

A community-oriented approach to evaluation also empowers residents, giving them a voice in shaping the program under study and encouraging greater support moving forward. This can lead to more effective and impactful programs.

Including community members and critical stakeholders requires evaluators and policymakers to invest time and energy to develop cultural competency and embrace transparency. Those investments are worth it, for a few reasons. Engaging community members in evaluations can enhance understanding of results.[11] More broadly, transparency about government activities can help strengthen Americans' trust in government, which is now at historic lows.[12]

What Authentic Community Engagement Looks Like

It's not enough just to ask people what they think or feel in surveys, focus groups or stakeholder interviews, although these are important qualitative methods for obtaining community input.[13] Authentic community engagement means involving individuals representative of a community in decision-making processes early, often, and in meaningful ways. It means showing respect for people's input by using it to guide decisions and actions and, when thinking differs, exploring why.

Equity is a key part of authentic community engagement. All relevant groups in impacted communities — especially those marginalized by structural racism, as well as other historically underserved groups — should be engaged. Achieving this in practice requires targeted outreach efforts, including working to elevate voices that are often overlooked or silenced.

Here are a few community engagement examples drawn from Results for America's 2023 State Standard of Excellence resource.

In **Minnesota,** the Department of Management and Budget wanted to build more community input into its performance evaluation work. So it worked with nonprofit leaders to develop the concept of "community-based best practices," which are activities, programs or services developed by or in close partnership with community and cultural groups that underwent a community-led assessment process.

Pennsylvania's PA Heart & Soul program supports equitable community development planning by bringing residents together to identify what matters most to them and reflect on what they love about their towns. The program, supported by the state's Department of Community and Economic Development and the PA Humanities Council, ensures that all voices can be heard.

In **Utah,** the Citizen Feedback Program places a high priority on engaging with members of historically underserved communities. Executive branch agencies actively seek community input. The Governor's Office's Senior Advisor on Equity and Opportunity ensures that the Governor's Office connects with groups that have historically not been included in state activities.

It is important that evaluators honor diverse experiences and perspectives, while acknowledging and addressing inherent power imbalances between themselves and community participants. Authentic community engagement spans four important areas that help to center equity in evaluation practices. These areas — not to be confused with the seven evaluation policy principles promoted in Chapter 4 — are detailed below with best practice tips.[14]

Transparency: Be open about the community input process, including why you're seeking community input.

- Be clear about how the input will be used, whether there are additional opportunities to engage in the evaluation project, who will interpret the findings and how and when results will be shared.

- Make sure community participants know how to get more information.

Representation: Use data and community organizations to identify and seek input from the people most affected by the issues that the program under evaluation aims to address.

- Community organizations can often be sources of data to help you identify and connect with these residents.

- Consider including community representatives in any advisory board created to guide the development of the evaluation, including community engagement strategies.

- Consider creating a key performance indicator (KPI) that measures how well the input you receive reflects the community you are attempting to serve.

Inclusivity: Offer accessible, varied ways for communities to offer input and feedback. This helps ensure you hear from a wide range of voices, especially those most affected by issues relevant to the evaluation and the intended beneficiaries of a program.

- Pre-test questions and collection methods with relevant groups.

- Consider both online and accessible in-person forums.

- Partner with community-based organizations to increase participation.

- Remember that many residents do not trust the government given historic, discriminatory track records.

- Spur participation and signal the value of feedback with monetary and non-monetary compensation.

- Work to eliminate barriers related to language, technology, physical ability, work schedules and childcare responsibilities.

Trust: Remember that every community member has unique insights and valuable contributions to make.

- Be mindful of your unconscious biases when reflecting on feedback received, particularly when you receive negative feedback.

- Show respect for ideas and experience by reporting back on how people's contributions did or did not play a role in decisions.

Remember: Authentic engagement isn't a one-off event and isn't just about gathering input. It's a long-term commitment to building relationships, trust and mutual understanding with the community. When done well, it can further large-scale change — reducing inequities, improving outcomes and materially improving residents' lives.

Centering equity impacts both community engagement processes and outcomes. In terms of process, it involves using accessible language, providing language translation and in-person/phone/online options, and being thoughtful about who is

conducting feedback sessions and outreach. Whenever possible, authentic engagement involves shared decision-making. This means that community members are partners in the process, rather than just passive participants.

In terms of results and outcomes, it involves disaggregating data to understand subgroup analysis, paying attention to outliers in the data and oversampling those who have been most harmed by the status quo, to list just a few examples. It requires ongoing, dedicated staff time and expertise, which should be built into a programs' budget and timeline.

CONSIDER
What does community engagement look like in your jurisdiction right now? Do you have ideas for how that process might be improved to more authentically engage residents? How might it be adapted for use in evaluations?

The Importance of Community Partners

Community-based organizations (CBOs). Faith-based institutions. Mutual aid organizations. Unions. Clubs. These and other potential partners are invaluable resources in the community engagement and evaluation process, due to their deep-rooted connections and understanding of the community members they serve.

Governments can benefit from engaging a broad spectrum of community partners, from larger, well-funded service delivery organizations to smaller, informal groups. Such partners offer unique perspectives and connections, helping evaluation teams capture and involve many elements of the community.

Here are five specific ways community partners can improve evaluations.

- **Identify** key stakeholders whose insights are crucial for the evaluation, and facilitate connections between these community members and evaluators.

- **Increase** the quality and relevance of data gathered, including by co-conducting community input activities such as surveys, focus groups and stakeholder interviews.

- **Provide** essential perspectives in interpreting evaluation findings. Partners' insights into local cultural, social or historical factors can enhance understanding of a program's implementation and outcomes.

- **Communicate** evaluation results back to the community in a culturally sensitive and accessible way.

- **Implement** recommended changes post-evaluation. Partners' understanding of what is feasible and acceptable within the community can help ensure evaluation insights translate into meaningful action.

Given the valuable contributions that community partners can make to an evaluation, it's important to consider appropriate compensation for their time and expertise.

When to Seek Community Input

Community input should be sought at multiple stages throughout an evaluation. This ensures the evaluation is relevant, inclusive and grounded in the experiences and needs of the community members the program is meant to serve.

Here's a phase-by-phase breakdown of when you may want to seek community input, with best practice suggestions:

Planning Phase Before the evaluation starts, seek input to help define which questions the evaluation should answer, what approaches should be used and what outcomes are most important to measure. Community members can inform and speak to the needs and challenges that require a solution, thereby shaping the research questions. At this stage, community input can also help in developing culturally sensitive and appropriate evaluation instruments, like surveys or interview guides.

- **Suggestions:**

  → Establish a steering committee or advisory board that includes representative community members who can provide input, feedback and validation throughout an evaluation.

  → Communicate early and proactively the importance of transparency, which may entail publishing unpopular findings.

  → Reach a clear and shared understanding of who is responsible for final decisions about specific aspects of the evaluation. This will help to prevent surprises and misunderstandings.

  → Solicit feedback to test your assumptions about the ways the intervention is thought to affect the outputs and outcomes.

Data Collection Phase During this phase community members should be key sources of data. Their experiences, perceptions, and insights are valuable for understanding the implementation and impact of the program being evaluated.

- **Suggestions:**

  → Proactively consider how you will handle and communicate data privacy concerns.

  → Seek input from community members on appropriate indicators to measure the inputs, outputs and, where relevant, outcomes of a program.

Data Analysis Phase Community members can help interpret findings, especially when it comes to understanding the local context and the nuances of the data.

- **Suggestions:**

  → Convene community members for an analysis review to help inform the interpretation of results.

→ Be mindful of clearly communicating that interim results can change as analysis progresses and more data is obtained.

Reporting and Dissemination Phase When evaluation results are being shared, community members can provide feedback on the interpretation of the findings and recommendations. They can also play a key role in disseminating findings within the community and with policymakers.

- **Suggestions:**

    → Invite community members to participate in forums to share research findings.

Post-Evaluation Phase Community input can take various forms. Community members could be engaged in discussions about how to implement recommendations or how to monitor and assess the effectiveness of any changes. They can also be advocates for changes and budget allocations based on evaluation findings.

- **Suggestions:**

    → Plan for ongoing engagements with the steering committee or advisory board to provide input around implementation.

> **CONSIDER**
> How has community input shown up in your organization's past evaluations, if at all? How might you bring community perspectives into your evaluation work?

Community Engagement and Institutional Review Boards

As you are determining when and how to seek community input for your evaluation, it's important to consider whether your proposed methodology would be considered human subjects research and require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. This is especially important if the community being studied includes vulnerable groups, such as children or people with disabilities. Some government agencies sponsor their own IRBs, while others depend on external IRBs. If your government has contracted with an evaluation firm or partnered with a university to conduct an evaluation, those organizations may have their own IRB requirements.

Incorporating These Practices Into Policy

Community input is far more likely to be incorporated into an evaluation if it is required by policy. To learn about how to create an evaluation policy, see Chapter 4.

Overcoming Community Engagement Challenges

It's normal to encounter hurdles in the realm of community engagement. Here are some common challenges encountered across four important areas: representation, inclusivity, trust and transparency.

	Challenge	Potential Solutions
Representation	You want to hold focus groups, but don't know where to start in terms of reaching individuals representative of the communities the program under evaluation aims to serve.	• If your jurisdiction has a dedicated public engagement person or team, or a chief equity officer, ask them for assistance. • Work with a community partner to develop a target outreach list for the focus groups. Ask for help sending out invitations. • Develop metrics for the characteristics of your ideal focus group (e.g., age, race, income, neighborhood, education level, etc.) to support targeted outreach
Inclusivity	Attendance is projected to be low at a scheduled in-person meeting in a government building at which initial evaluation findings will be shared — and the majority of RSVPs are not community members served by the program.	• Move the meeting to a location such as a community center within the neighborhood or area a program serves. • Enlist trusted messengers to help share the invitation with your target population • Ensure your outreach has been shared in all appropriate languages. Make clear translators will be available if needed. • Consider whether a community or other organization may be better suited to host (or co-host) the meeting. • Consider adding virtual options for additional opportunities for feedback. • Consider offering non-monetary and monetary incentives, as well as on-site childcare and transportation to/from the event.

Trust	Some community members you seek to engage do not trust the government. But obtaining their buy-in and feedback is critical to understanding what is and isn't working for the program.	• Acknowledge that the distrust they feel for the government is valid. • Be as specific as possible when describing the racialized harms and inequities that have been perpetuated. • Learn about the root causes of distrust and articulate an understanding of this history and the harm created. • Share why their input and participation is important and how it will inform government decisions. Let people know how findings will be communicated. Follow through and respond to feedback, even if it differs from the outcome the commenter had wanted. Responsiveness builds more trust than silence.
Transparency	Community members have said they don't see the point of participating in stakeholder interviews, since their feedback is never actually incorporated.	• Review and adjust the invitations to include information on the program and evaluation, including how these interviews will inform decision-making. • Provide a timeline for when the evaluation will be complete and when (and how) results will be shared. Make sure to follow through! • Include details on how the findings will be used. • Share a summary of feedback received, even before evaluation findings are available. • Where possible, be clear about which feedback was not incorporated and why.
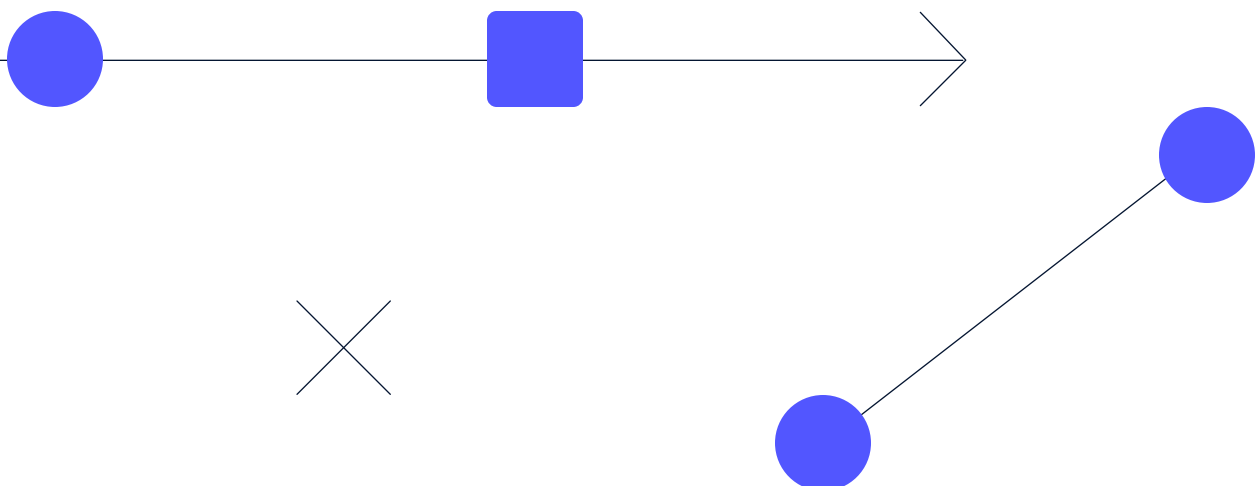
Exercise 3: Incorporating Community Input Into Evaluations

Designing an evaluation that centers equity requires thoughtful attention to power dynamics, community needs and interests, and potential benefits and harms. The following questions address all stages of the evaluation process — design, execution analysis,

1. **REPRESENTATION** **Identify the community members most affected by the issues the program being evaluated seeks to address.**

   - Is there data available on this population, and if so, who has it?

   - How will you know if the input you gather is representative of your target population?

2. **INCLUSIVITY** **Offer multiple methods to gain feedback and to reach different communities.**

   - What plans might you put in place to eliminate barriers related to language, technology, physical ability, work schedules and childcare responsibilities?

   - How might you partner with community organizations to increase turnout?

   - What resources can you allocate to ensure you have the staff capacity or can compensate community members for their time?

3. **`RESPECT`** **Recognize that every community member has unique insights and valuable contributions to make.**

   - What norms might you put in place around your evaluation process to ensure everyone in the process feels respected and valued?

   - What might be culturally sensitive and appropriate measurement instruments for this community?

4. **`TRANSPARENCY`** **Share why you're seeking community input, how it will be used and what the outcomes are.**

   - How will you let participants know how their input will be used?

   - What is the plan — and timing — for sharing the results?

   - Will there be other opportunities for participants to engage in the process, and if so, how?

Chapter 4

Establishing an Evaluation Policy
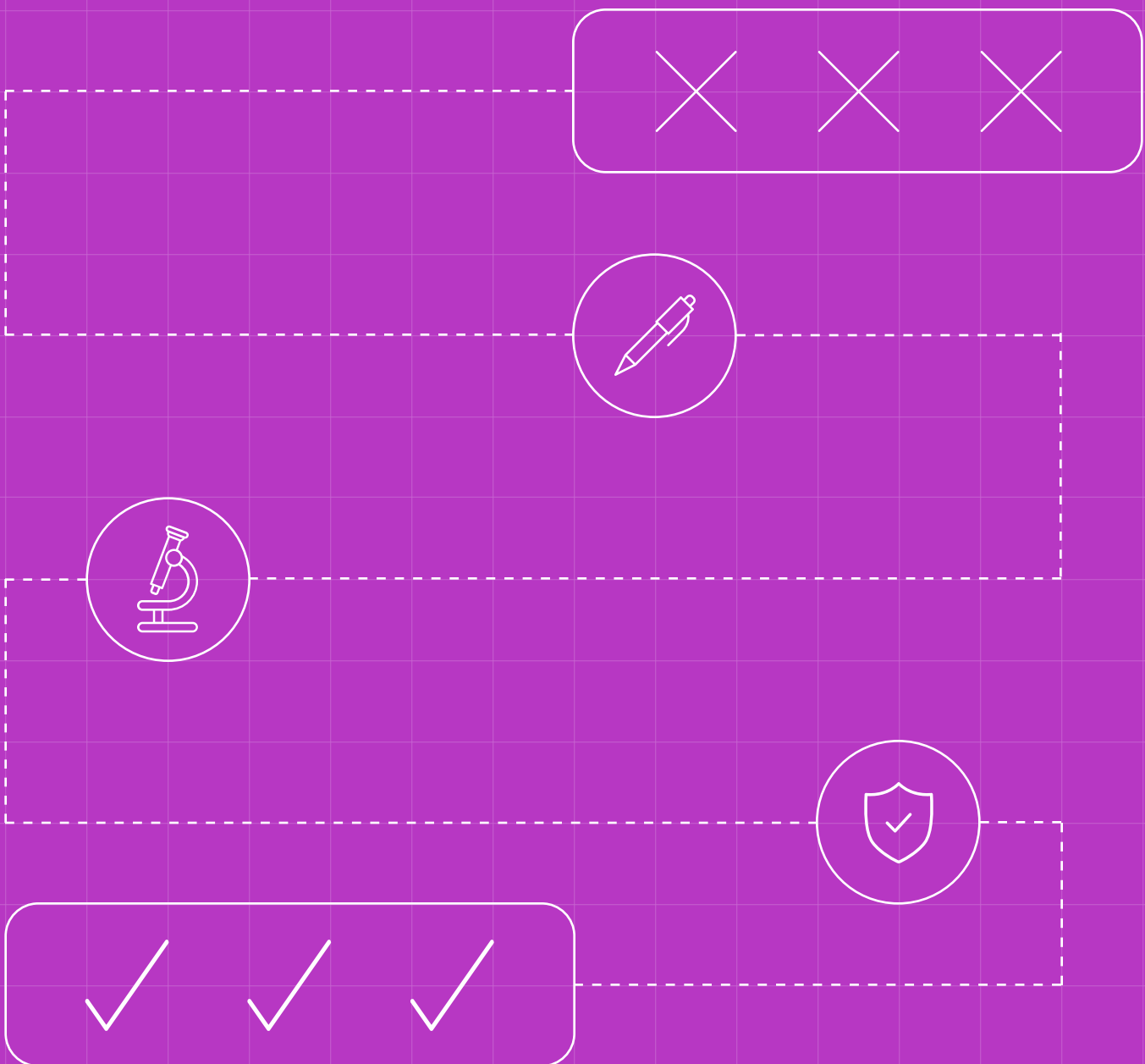
Why This Matters

Residents, elected officials and other stakeholders in your jurisdiction increasingly expect program and budget decisions to be based on solid evidence. Building this evidence to measure effectiveness and support decisions requires rigorous evaluations — which are more likely to become business as usual if an agency or entire institution has a clear evaluation policy.

Without such a policy, it is hard to establish new institutional practices to regularly invest time and resources into evidence-building evaluations. Further, a commitment to evidence and evaluations needs to be sustained beyond the tenure of one supportive, influential leader. An established policy is like a signpost signaling that evaluations someone needs to follow.

An evaluation policy articulates an agency's principles, goals and practices for building and using evidence. It can serve several purposes:

- Promote and protect the integrity of evaluation activities by highlighting principles such as independence, objectivity, transparency and equity as a process as well as an outcome.

- Provide guidance on the agency's expected practices for building and using evidence.

- Clarify how equitable processes and outcomes are being planned for and executed through an evaluation.

- Build shared understanding and support for building and using evidence across an agency's divisions and with external stakeholders.

- Orient new staff and leaders to the agency's evaluation goals, principles and practices.

- Elevate or bolster the status of evaluation and the use of evidence both internally and externally.

- Help to create a learning agenda and culture for the department, agency or state/local/tribal government.

Developing a Policy

As a starting point for creating an evaluation policy, consider consulting across agency divisions and with external stakeholders. Consultation helps to both improve the policy's content and build institutional support and buy-in for it.

Defining Evaluation

Some evaluation policies define evaluation. Here are two example definitions, one federal and one local:

"[A]n assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of one or more programs, policies, and organizations intended to assess their effectiveness and efficiency."

—Office of Management and Budget, Executive Office of the President

"A systemic method for collecting, analyzing, and using data to examine the impact, effectiveness, and efficiency of a program. Evaluations require (1) asking a specific question, (2) making a plan to answer the question, (3) collecting data and (4) using that data to answer the question."

—City of Tempe, Arizona

(For information on how to define evidence, see Chapter 1.)

Components

Many evaluation policies integrate five major principles: rigor, relevance, independence, transparency and ethics. (See "Evaluation Policy Guidance From Washington D.C." on p.44 to learn about the federal government's guidance in these five areas.) Results for America recommends that policies also encompass two additional values: equity and cultural validity, humility and competency.

Here is an overview of all seven principles:

Rigor Evaluations must produce findings that agencies and their stakeholders can confidently rely upon. Committing to rigor ensures that your investments in evaluations produce sound evidence you need for future decision making.

Relevance The results of an evaluation must be useful for your jurisdiction or agency. Prioritize evaluations that might drive investment decisions, impact current processes or address questions about services that your community members want answered.

Independence Evaluations must be objective in order for stakeholders, experts and the public to accept their findings.

Transparency To enable accountability and ensure that an evaluation is not tailored to generate specific findings, evaluations must be transparent across the planning, implementation and reporting phases.

Ethics Evaluations should be planned and implemented to safeguard the dignity, rights, safety and privacy of participants and other stakeholders and affected entities.

Equity Evaluation is a critical tool to advance equity as a process and an outcome. If designed with equity in mind, evaluations can show the effectiveness of policies or practices for different population groups. Equity is also a principle that shapes evaluation processes and practices

such as community engagement. (See Chapter 3 for more on gathering community input.)

Cultural validity, humility and competency Evaluations should accurately and respectfully reflect the life experiences and perspectives of program participants. They should recognize the value of knowledge gained from lived experiences. And they should acknowledge the complexity of cultural identity, recognize the dynamics of power, eliminate bias in language and employ culturally appropriate methods.[15]

CONSIDER

To support equity while planning evaluations, consider posing the following questions to staff:

- Does the evaluation plan involve consulting with key populations and stakeholders to inform research questions, methods and analysis?

- Is the evaluation plan designed in a way that is mindful of power dynamics present in the communities under study?

- Is there any biased language present in the evaluation plan?

For more questions, see **this resource** from King County, Washington.

Evaluation Policy Guidance From Washington D.C.

In recent years many governments have established evaluation policies. The trend was accelerated by the federal Foundations of Evidence-Based Policy Making Act of 2018 (aka, Evidence Act), which made such policies mandatory for cabinet-level federal agencies. Some state and local agencies (e.g., Minnesota) have established evaluation policies as well.

The Evidence Act required the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to establish program evaluation standards to guide federal agencies in developing and implementing evaluation activities and policies. The OMB's five standards[16] — reproduced verbatim here — can serve as a starting point for state and local agencies that are considering creating evaluation policies.

Relevance and Utility Federal evaluations must address questions of importance and serve the information needs of stakeholders in order to be useful resources. Evaluations should present findings that are actionable and available in time for use. Information should be presented in ways that are understandable and that can inform agency activities and actions such as budgeting, program improvement, accountability, management, regulatory action and policy development.

Rigor Federal evaluations must produce findings that federal agencies and their stakeholders can confidently rely upon, while providing clear explanations of limitations. The quality of an evaluation depends on the underlying design and methods, implementation and how findings are interpreted and reported. Credible evaluations must be managed by qualified evaluators with relevant education, skills and experience for the methods undertaken. An evaluation must have the most appropriate design and methods to answer key questions, while balancing its goals, scale, timeline, feasibility and available resources.

Independence and Objectivity Federal evaluations must be viewed as objective in order for stakeholders, experts and the public to accept their findings. This depends on the independence and objectivity of the evaluators. Federal agencies should enable evaluators to, and evaluators should, operate with an appropriate level of independence from programmatic, regulatory,

policymaking and stakeholder activities. While stakeholders have an important role in identifying evaluation priorities, the implementation of evaluation activities, including how evaluators are selected and operate, should be appropriately insulated from political and other undue influences that may affect their objectivity, impartiality and professional judgment. Evaluators should strive for objectivity in the planning and conduct of evaluations and in the interpretation and dissemination of findings, avoiding conflicts of interest, bias and other partiality.

Transparency Federal evaluation must be transparent in the planning, implementation and reporting phases to enable accountability and help ensure that aspects of an evaluation are not tailored to generate specific findings. Decisions about the evaluation's purpose and objectives (including internal versus public use), the range of stakeholders who will have access to details of the work and findings, the design and methods, and the timeline and strategy for releasing findings should be clearly documented before conducting the evaluation. These decisions should take into consideration any legal, ethical, national security or other constraints for disclosing information.

Once evaluations are complete, comprehensive reporting of the findings should be released in a timely manner and provide sufficient detail so that others can review, interpret or replicate/reproduce the work.

Ethics Federal evaluations must be conducted to the highest ethical standards to protect the public and maintain public trust in the government's efforts. Evaluations should be planned and implemented to safeguard the dignity, rights, safety and privacy of participants and other stakeholders and affected entities. Evaluators should abide by current professional standards pertaining to treatment of participants. Evaluations should be equitable, fair and just, and should take into account cultural and contextual factors that could influence the findings or their use.[17]

The OMB's guidance also describes evaluation practices to support these five standards.

Policies in Place: Real-World Examples

Federal

A catalog of federal evaluation policies is available at Evaluation.gov. Here is a sampling of examples showing the varied scope, level of detail and focus of evaluations.

U.S. Health and Human Services: The department's Administration for Children and Families (ACF) adopted a policy in 2021 that is designed around OMB's five standards. Its "Rigor" section states that ACF "will recruit and maintain an evaluation workforce with the knowledge, training and experience appropriate for planning and overseeing a rigorous evaluation portfolio."

U.S. Department of Treasury: Its one-page evaluation policy lists and briefly describes five principles based on the OMB standards detailed above. It also includes quality standards related to staff expertise, evaluation designs, data quality, presentation of findings and post-evaluation action plans.

U.S. Department of Labor: The agency's policy "represents a commitment to conducting rigorous, relevant evaluations and to using evidence from evaluations to inform policy and practice." The policy, which is modeled on OMB standards, includes a requirement that DOL grantees are willing to participate in evaluations.

U.S. Agency for International Development: The agency's evaluation policy, originally established in 2011, is a 20-page guide. It covers the purposes of evaluation, organizational roles and responsibilities, and evaluation practices and requirements. In addition to discussing principles similar to the OMB standards, the policy discusses reinforcing local ownership of evaluation and the use of findings, consistent with USAID's mission. It also discusses the use of evaluation findings in strategy development and decision-making.

States

Results for America's 2023 State Standard of Excellence spotlights 11 state governments that have an evaluation policy and a learning agenda to support the building and use of evidence. Two state examples are:

North Carolina: To support opportunities for evaluation, state agencies are developing "Priority Questions" as part of the 2023-2025 strategic plans.

Minnesota: The state's evaluation policy requires the public release of all completed evaluation reports regardless of findings. All completed evaluations are added to the Minnesota Inventory, which shows the evidence base for 730 state interventions.

Exercise 4: Develop Your Evaluation Policy

Building off the evaluation policy standards and components described in this chapter, begin developing your own evaluation policy. You can also read Results for America's recommended evaluation policy language in our additional resources section.

Purpose Statement: Why has your jurisdiction decided to develop an evaluation policy and how will it be used?

Principles: Describe how the evaluation policy will integrate these seven important values.

Relevance:

[   ]

Rigor:

[   ]

Transparency:

[   ]

Independence:

[   ]

Ethics:

[   ]

Equity:

[   ]

Cultural Validity, Humility and Competence:

[   ]

Key Practices

Evaluation Plan: Which activities — community engagement, theory of change, etc. — are critical to your evaluation plan, and why?
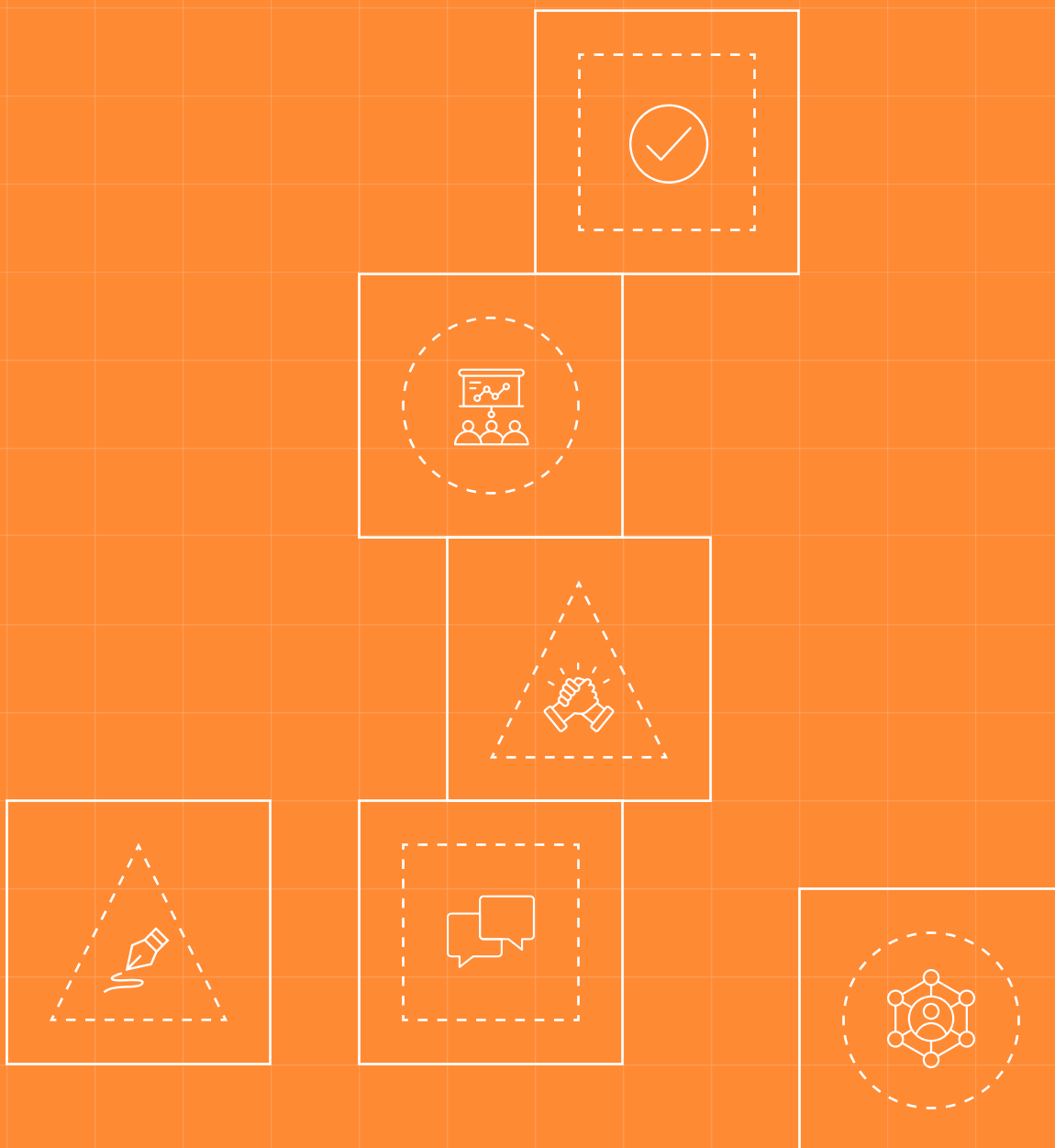
Data Quality: What are your standards for data and disaggregation?

Evaluation Findings: What will you do to share the results with community members, internal teams and the broader field?

Post-Evaluation: How are you going to incorporate what you've learned into program design/performance management?

Adopting and Building Support for the Policy

Why This Matters

Achieving formal adoption of an evaluation policy increases the likelihood that 1) evaluations will become part of the organization's practices and culture and 2) resources will be made available to support implementation of the evaluation policy.

Successful adoption of an evaluation policy, however, requires effective change management. Organizations should consider best practices in change management as they plan for and pursue policy adoption. At the same time, change leaders should be mindful of the policy changes the organization has successfully implemented in the past so that an adoption plan reflects the unique strengths and culture of the organization.

An evaluation policy adoption plan should include three important steps:

1 **Select the appropriate adoption mechanism**

2 **Identify and understand key stakeholders**

3 **Institutionalize the policy**

This chapter details these steps.

"Adopting a policy doesn't ensure the evaluation program exists forever, but it moves the program beyond one person driving it."

—Sarah Mostafa, City of Cincinnati

Selecting the Appropriate Adoption Mechanism

An evaluation policy can be implemented using either a legislative or executive approach. Each approach has its own opportunities and challenges.

Legislative Adoption

A legislative approach involves a resolution, ordinance or code change adopted by a legislative body, such as a city council, county commission or state legislature. While this approach is rare, there are several reasons an organization may choose to adopt an evaluation policy legislatively.

The Opportunities

- A legislative policy is public-facing and can therefore provide greater visibility for the initiative overall. This may be necessary to secure buy-in and ensure implementation.

- Legislative action also communicates that the policy is a high priority across the organization's leadership. The process for adopting legislation includes opportunities for public input, which is often valuable to an organization's leaders and elected officials.

- Depending on the political environment and turnover rate of elected officials, codifying an evaluation policy may ensure the policy endures for a longer period.

- Since legislative bodies typically possess appropriation authority, adoption of an evaluation policy via legislation may result in the initiative securing the financial and human resources necessary for implementation. It should also be noted that, if the legislative branch expresses interest in and a desire to create an evaluation policy, legislative adoption may be the only option available to the project champions.

The Challenges

- Legislative processes are often longer than executive policy adoption processes.

- Legislative policies can be more difficult to amend or change. This can pose

an obstacle for organizations intending to update the policy based on what they learn as they use it, although this challenge can be mitigated through a general policy that is accompanied by implementation guidance.

- An evaluation policy (and resulting evaluations) adopted through the legislative process may be exposed to additional scrutiny. This can raise the stakes for programs being evaluated and may impact the willingness of program staff to fully participate. Especially for an organization new to conducting evaluations, this can be problematic.

Executive Adoption

An alternative approach involves an administrative instruction, executive order or even just an operating procedure that is adopted by an executive. (The executive may be a mayor, governor, department director, chief administrative officer or other state-level leader.) This is the most common approach used by organizations to adopt evaluation policies. More variety exists within this mechanism, however, as an adopted policy may be organization-wide, department-specific, or just included in operating procedures or process instructions.

The Opportunities

- Policies adopted through the executive powers of a government organization can often be adopted more quickly than passing legislation.

- Another benefit of this approach is its flexibility, which is important for evaluation policies that involve phased implementation or pilot programs. This allows a policy to more easily evolve, with updates made based on lessons learned.

- It can be rolled out at the most accessible scale for your jurisdiction. This can be particularly important in organizations that do not yet have buy-in from employees as it provides a safe and constructive space in which to conduct process and impact evaluations. In fact, some organizations choose to evolve existing processes — in the realm of performance management or budgeting, for example — by incorporating an evaluation policy into the administrative policies that guide those functions.

The Challenges

- Adopting a policy administratively may not communicate the same level of importance or prioritization as a legislative policy.

- The ease of adopting a policy via executive action means it can be just as easy to eliminate the policy.

- Administratively-adopted policies are less likely to come with financial or human resources. Therefore agencies or departments may need to go through the organization's budget process to secure funding or rely on existing financial and human resources to conduct evaluations.

Take a Step Back

When considering how to adopt an evaluation policy, an organization should reflect on other policies (e.g., performance management or equity) that have been incorporated into culture and practices. A similar implementation approach may prove successful.

CONSIDER
Would a legislative, executive or blended approach to establishing an evaluation policy work best for your organization? How might you mitigate potential downsides to your preferred approach?

Legislative and executive adoption approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Organizations sometimes pursue a blended approach to adoption, starting with administrative instructions and then later formalizing the policy via legislation.

Policy Adoption Win in Tempe, Arizona

In December 2022, the Tempe City Council unanimously approved a new evaluation policy. The policy embeds evaluation standards and practices across city government, instead of what had been a more ad hoc approach.

"While the city evaluates its programs, policies, and services in various ways, it does not currently have a standardized set of guidelines or guiding principles related to evaluations," the Council's resolution reads. "Conducting meaningful, novel, and actionable evaluations will better enable City departments to achieve performance outcomes, increase efficiency, and provide greater accountability to the community."

Conversely, a legislative body might require the executive branch to develop and adopt an evaluation policy.

Identifying and Understanding Key Stakeholders

When embarking on a significant policy change process, organizations should conduct a stakeholder landscape analysis. A landscape analysis involves assessing various stakeholders — including both champions and detractors — based on their level of interest and level of influence, and assigning them to one of four types.

Opposition Stakeholders who are disinterested or opposed but have little influence on decision-makers.	**Opposition with Influence** Stakeholders who are disinterested or opposed with significant influence or the ability to make decisions.
Champions Stakeholders who are interested or motivated but have little influence on decision-makers.	**Champions with Influence** Stakeholders who are excited with significant influence on decision-makers, or able to make decisions.

Once key stakeholders have been identified, their perspectives can be explored and understood. (See the landscape analysis exercise at the end of this chapter.)

Understanding the perspectives of detractors is particularly important, and not only because detractors can potentially derail a change effort. Detractors often have valid concerns, and addressing those concerns can strengthen an initiative. Concerns of key detractors should be heard and addressed to the full extent possible.

Three key potential detractor stakeholder groups are:

- **program employees,** who may fear that evaluations could result in additional work or potentially impact their livelihoods;

- **program or department leaders,** who may fear the results of evaluations or the cost and staff resources required to conduct them; and

- **employees in central services** (e.g., budget, purchasing), who may worry that the evaluation policy will result in more work for them.

Champions are also critical to identify as they will be necessary throughout the adoption and implementation portions of an evaluation initiative.

One of the ways to address the concerns of detractors and support champions is to create success stories. Many organizations' evaluation policies start as pilots or unit-specific initiatives. Early successes build trust and can be highlighted when addressing the concerns of detractors. Moreover, early successes can also be used by champions as they promote the evaluation policy and demonstrate that evaluations will impact decisions.

Making Change Happen: Best Practices

Change doesn't just happen. It requires sustained, targeted efforts to align stakeholders and secure their commitment to change over time. In terms of adopting an evaluation policy, the change process starts with leaders taking action to elevate the need for an evaluation policy. The following change management best practices are relevant to any government change effort.[19]

- Find champions to help spread the word, implement changes and eliminate barriers.

- Establish a working group, committee or task force composed of champions and subject matter experts to lead the change effort.

- Focus on short-term wins to build momentum on the way to long-term success, while balancing a sense of urgency with thoughtful, intentional action.

- Reinforce the established change at a systems level.

- Create continual evaluation and feedback loops to better inform future refinements.

An 80-Second Video to Spread the Word

To promote its new evaluation policy to nontechnical audiences, the U.S. Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) created a short video. Available on YouTube, the video details the five principles grounding the policy — rigor, relevance, transparency, independence and ethics — and why the policy is important. This helped to increase understanding of and build momentum for effective programs and data-driven governance.

To learn more about how to create an evaluation policy and guiding principles, see Chapter 4.

Not every evaluation will yield significant positive findings. Given this, it is important that evaluators develop evaluation questions that will generate useful information whether the impact findings are positive, null or negative. For example, questions about processes may yield findings that could be used to improve program services, increase efficiency or reduce costs.

CONSIDER
What might be some of the strongest arguments in favor of and against an evaluation policy?

Implementing Your Evaluation Policy

Simply adopting an evaluation policy will not change the culture and the behavior of an organization. True implementation involves institutionalizing the policy's requirements and goals through habitual practices. An effective policy comes to life in these practices — an organization's day-to-day activities.

Follow these steps to ensure an evaluation policy reaches its full potential:

1 Share it widely, often and creatively to ensure the policy is integrated into government priorities and activities. Consider spotlighting the policy's content on social media or in blogs or newsletters, creating a new annual reporting mechanism, or incorporating reporting into the annual budgeting process, for example.

2 Educate new staff and agency leaders about the policy to ensure its principles become part of the organization's shared values and culture. Consider developing a training on the policy, including profiling how evaluations are being used to inform decision making and including in the onboarding of new employees.

3 Incorporate the policy into budgeting, performance management, strategic planning and other decision-making processes.

4 Set aside funding to support evaluations. Results for America recommends that governments spend at least 1% of program budgets on evidence-building activities.

5 Incorporate program evaluations into leadership job descriptions, similar to how employee performance evaluations are typically included in job descriptions.

6 Highlight program successes and evaluation lessons learned at conferences and in publications.

7 Incorporate the policy into requests for proposal (RFPs), contracts and grants so that contractors and grantees adhere to it.

Organizations should reflect on long-standing policies and how they became institutionalized. Consider replicating and expanding upon those implementation practices and approaches.

From Policy to Day-to-Day Reality

Who in your organization will own evaluation policy implementation? How will you budget for evaluations? What resources will support evaluation planning and practices? Use this Evaluation Policy Checklist to understand potential answers to these questions and many more.

Exercise 5: Weighing Evaluation Policy Adoption Mechanisms

Talk with your team about each mechanism for adoption, considering their value and feasibility in your context. Then select the adoption process you want to pursue. Remember: you can always select a blended or phased approach!

Instructions

1. List your opportunities with both strategies. These should include both the long-term benefits as well as any champions and other resources you can leverage to adopt the policy.

2. List the challenges of both strategies. Challenges should include both the long term impact as well as detractors or barriers to successful adoption.

3. Identify the overall feasibility of the adoption strategy and how likely it is to work.
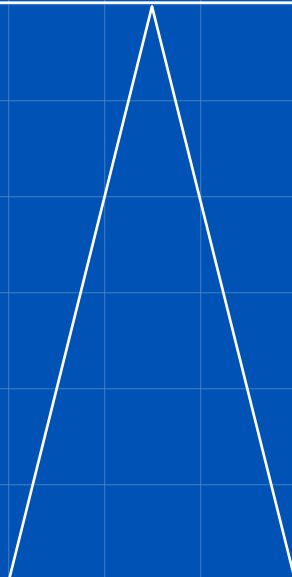
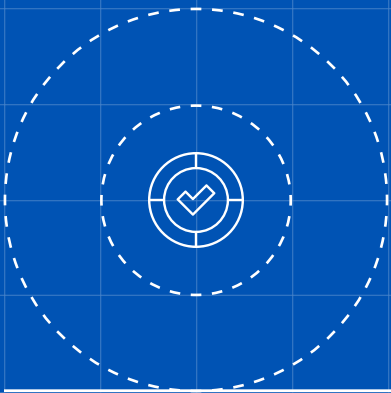4. Describe the ideal strategy for your action plan.

	Legislative Adoption	Executive Adoption
Opportunities		
Challenges		
Feasibility		

Ideal Strategy to Pursue	

Chapter 6

Leveraging Evaluation Opportunities

Why This Matters

Alongside establishing and adopting an evaluation policy, organizations should build their evaluation capacity. This chapter aims to equip governments with the necessary knowledge and skills to build related practices. The ultimate goals: enable evidence-based decisions, improve programs and services, and advance equitable outcomes.

The ability to identify and leverage the right evaluation opportunities is an important step in building your evaluation practice. Organizations that can do so are able to:

- align evaluation efforts and resources to focus on opportunities with the greatest feasibility and potential to drive equity;

- enhance the quality and usefulness of evaluations, ensuring they are aligned with strategic priorities;

- ensure evaluation insights are used to shape policies and practices, fostering a culture of learning and continuous improvement; and

- explore evaluation design and tools that embrace racial equity/equity as a core value.

These capabilities set the foundation for effective evaluation practice and capacity development. They also can help to make the case for continued investment in evaluations.

How to Identify Valuable Opportunities

Potentially valuable evaluation opportunities can arise for a variety of reasons. A program may be under political or media scrutiny. A federal or nonprofit grant funding stream may begin in one year, heightening the need to gather evidence of effectiveness to strengthen an application. A pilot program might be in its last year; evaluation could help ensure continued, long-term funding by a city or state.

To identify valuable evaluation opportunities, organizations should consider taking the following steps detailed below:

1   **identify goals that evaluations may support;**

2   **identify evaluation partners;**

3   **define research questions of interest;**

4   **select an appropriate evaluation approach; and**

5   **develop an evaluation plan**

Although the order of these steps may vary depending on an organization's context and starting point, all should be part of comprehensive evaluation planning.

Also keep in mind that if your organization has adopted an evaluation policy (see Chapter 5), it can spur the creation of a learning or evaluation agenda and serve as a touchstone for prioritizing individual evaluation opportunities.

Step 1: Identify Goals That Evaluations May Support

In conversations with teams across your organization, community members and other external stakeholders, you may consider:

Strategic Goals

Understanding these provides a clear sense of direction and ensures that any evaluation efforts are aligned with the organization's overall vision and objectives.

Equity-related questions:
- Are strategic goals focused on equity-related priorities?
- Do they represent viewpoints from across the organization?

Stakeholder Landscape

It is key to align your goals with the interests of stakeholders. For evaluation projects, the populations your organization serves are particularly important to consider. Also consider stakeholders such as community groups, academics and nonprofits that may have an interest in a topic. (See Chapter 3 to learn about how to engage community-based stakeholders.)

Equity-related questions:
- Who is your program currently serving? Who else could it serve?
- Are certain historically underserved communities more or less likely to support evaluation of the program?

Potential Impact

Finding opportunities that have a clear pathway for impact helps ensure that the evaluation will provide value for the department and, in turn, the organization. Reflect on who stands to benefit and how to avoid harm as you design the evaluation.

Equity-related questions:
- Would the evaluation adversely impact the community in any way?
  Would certain groups or populations be more impacted than others?
- How might the evaluation or its findings create harm and how can this be prevented?
- How will learnings be shared so they reach potential beneficiaries?

To begin identifying evaluation opportunities for your organization, see the exercise at the end of this chapter.

Step 2: Identify Your Evaluation Partners

Evaluation partners are the organizations or teams that you will work with to design and implement the evaluation. These could be:

- **program teams** that own and implement the program being evaluated. These internal partners will collaborate with you to provide access to information about the program, including relevant data and insights necessary for conducting the evaluation. The evaluation partner may also provide documentation, access to participants or stakeholders and other necessary resources.

- **technical partners** with expertise in research, data collection, analysis and evaluation methodologies. These partners could provide additional experience or capacity when designing or implementing your evaluation. They could be internal or external to your organization — for example, a local nonprofit organization, evaluation contractor or a university or college.

> **CONSIDER**
> **Are Department Staff Enthusiastic About an Evaluation?**
>
> Staff interest in the work is a strong indicator that a potential evaluation will have buy-in when it comes time to execute the project. Departments who have embraced other forms of process improvement or innovation activities often make for good candidates for evaluation—they've already started the process of making a change!

For example, King County in the state of Washington often partners with Notre Dame University for evaluations (example here). The City of Washington D.C. often relies on The Lab @ DC, its internal data and evaluation shop. In Boston, a third-party research firm was hired by city partner Compass Working Capital to evaluate the Boston Housing Authority's Financial Self-Sufficiency program.

- **program participants and other community stakeholders** with an understanding of the realities of the program. Their input and engagement is critical throughout the evaluation process. It is important to ensure that these partners are empowered to bring the community's diverse experiences and perspectives to the table, and for evaluation teams to recognize the assets and lessons learned by these stakeholders.

- **other external partners** supporting the implementation of this evaluation. For example, funding organizations may have an interest in participating in evaluation design activities or ask for quarterly updates on the evaluation's progress.

Identifying evaluation partners should involve a thoughtful three-step approach:

- **first, assess your organization's evaluation needs and capacity to determine the specific expertise and skills required from a partner.** Consider factors such as their knowledge of the program area, evaluation methodologies and/or data analysis capabilities.

- **second, identify potential evaluation partners that fit your needs.** If this is a team, explore your professional networks to determine the appropriate contact person. Determine if internal or external partners (or both) will be most able to address your needs.

- **third, engage in scoping conversations with potential evaluation partners.** These are structured discussions you can use to build excitement and interest for evaluation projects, identify potential evaluation opportunities and assess partners' availability and capacity for a potential collaboration.

You may also choose to use more formal engagement processes, such as Statements of Interest, Requests for Information (RFI) or Requests for Proposals (RFP), to source evaluation partners.[18]

Step 3: Define Research Questions of Interest

Your team is now ready to begin translating what you're learning from scoping conversations into tangible research questions. You will use these to develop a research approach that aligns with emerging evaluation opportunities.

A good research question (1) describes exactly what you will learn from your evaluation; (2) clarifies what you will not learn; and (3) is written collaboratively with internal and external evaluation partners and, where possible, community stakeholders.

Spotlight: How the City of Tulsa Identified the Right Evaluation Opportunity

In recent years the City of Tulsa, Oklahoma has committed to building its evaluation capacity. Its first step? Identifying the right opportunity. To help prioritize various evaluation ideas, the City identified opportunities with (1) significance and clear benefit to residents; (2) department interest, capacity and resources; and (3) technical feasibility.

Ultimately, after discussing potential evaluation scopes with a few departments — and indicating a willingness to be flexible — the team was able to identify a standout opportunity: evaluating the Municipal Court Special Services program. This important program provides vulnerable individuals facing mental illness, substance abuse or homelessness with an alternative to serving jail time.

Evaluation showed that the program clearly benefits residents by lowering recidivism rates and incarceration costs. As a result of evaluating when and how referrals are made to the program, the team was able to recommend strategic uses for program funds, including improving transportation access to court to remove barriers to participation.
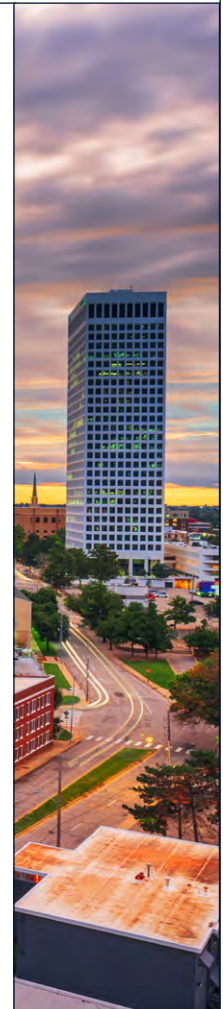
Research questions should address:

- desired sample, or the group of people from whom you are collecting data;

- the specific policy, services or program that you are studying;

- outcome, or what it is that you are measuring;

- timeframe, or the period of time you're measuring over; and

- what you are comparing or measuring against.

As you brainstorm research questions, keep in mind that evaluations should produce information that is meaningful, novel and actionable. Like the language you have incorporated into your evaluation policy, ensure that each evaluation is also feasible to implement.

- **Meaningful** Aligns with strategic priorities and offers a clear benefit for residents

- **Novel** Your evaluation gives you new information you wouldn't have had otherwise

- **Actionable** Your evaluation gives you information you can use to improve your service or policy, regardless of how the findings turn out.

- **Feasible** You and your evaluation partners have the resources (e.g., capacity, monetary), skills and time to conduct the evaluation.

Note that research questions can address both how the work was carried out (processes), as well as what results or impacts were achieved (outcomes). For example:

Process	• Was the intervention delivered as designed? Where there were deviations, what caused them? • What are the strengths and weaknesses of the process? • How accessible and accepted was the intervention approach? • Which aspects of the intervention were most utilized? • What considerations arose for organizational capacity, partnership or collaboration?
Outcomes	• What are the long-term effects of the intervention, both intended and unintended? • What type of changes occurred in participant attitude, beliefs or knowledge as a result of their experience? • What type of changes occurred in participant behavior? • What was the cost relative to the benefits? • To what extent did the intervention meet or exceed the stated goals? • What external factors impacted the results of the individual?

Importantly, your research questions will help you select a suitable evaluation approach. In other words, the focus and goal of the research directly relates to the method of research.

Example: The City of San Antonio's Research Question

San Antonio's Economic Development Department (EDD) launched Train for Jobs SA, a job program intended for people in industries who were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The program had significant excess capacity, which EDD staff believed was due to lack of awareness. After initial scoping conversations, EDD identified the **project topic**:

How residents would engage with information about workforce services through different communication channels

Eventually EDD was able to refine this into a **formal, concrete research question** that guided their evaluation efforts:

Does distributing job training information to households that applied for COVID-19 assistance via postcard or SMS result in more calls to 311, three weeks after communications are sent?

Step 4: Select an Appropriate Evaluation Approach

Evaluation approaches vary by the types of questions they can answer, the resources required and the level of methodological rigor. The right approach for your evaluation project will help you answer your research question while striking the right balance between available resources and the rigor required for reliable results.

One evaluation approach isn't necessarily better than another — they're just different. Here is an overview of two important approaches: impact evaluations and process evaluations.

Impact Evaluations

Impact evaluations are used to assess program effectiveness in achieving its ultimate objectives or goals. They can help identify the causal effect of a program.

There are two main types of impact evaluations: randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental design. Both are applicable to public-sector work and accessible to those who are conducting evaluations for the first time.

Two Types of Impact Evaluations	
Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)	**Quasi-Experimental Design (QED)**
• Aims to identify the difference between what happens, on average, to a group of people exposed to an intervention (or 'treatment') vs. what would have happened to that same group if they hadn't been exposed to it. • Uses randomization to create two or more groups of people who are comparable based on observable individual characteristics (e.g., gender, age).	• Aims to achieve conditions that are "nearly as good as random" when randomization or RCTs are not possible. This could be because you do not have control over the participant experience, or because it is not ethically viable to randomize. • Often used to conduct retroactive research (i.e., standards are naturally met based on how a policy or program was implemented). After implementation, researchers can identify whether the standards for a particular QED method (e.g., difference-in-differences, matching, regression discontinuity) have been met or not.
Requires: • Ability to randomize participants into treatment and comparison groups: some level of control is needed to execute randomization / assign individuals to different groups • Technical skills: data collection and execution of statistical analyses (e.g., t-tests, regressions) • Partners: to run an RCT, you will likely want to partner with an external expert (e.g., academic)	**Requires:** • Satisfying key assumptions: will vary based on the type of QED method and should be confirmed before and after running your evaluation • Technical skills: strong understanding of key assumptions, skills to validate them as well as handle data collected and execute basic to advanced statistical tests.

Process Evaluations

Process evaluations are used to answer questions related to the implementation and delivery of a program. As the name suggests, these evaluations focus on process. They can help you learn how a program (or part of a program) is running and whether it appears to be working as intended.

Five common dimensions that a process evaluation might assess include:

- **Fidelity:** Was the program implemented as planned?

- **Quality:** How well was the program delivered?

- **Reach:** Who received the program?

- **Acceptability:** How did participants react or respond to the program?

- **Adaptation:** What changes (if any) were made to the program during implementation?

Process evaluations typically combine different types of data collection and analyses to help answer research questions. Data can be both quantitative and qualitative. For example, the Seattle Department of Education & Early Learning conducted a process evaluation of the Seattle Promise Scholar Persistence and Advising Support program. It used both qualitative and quantitative data to understand program implementation, student experiences and short-term outcomes.

- **Quantitative data** (e.g., attendance rates, administrative data) are often helpful to answer research questions related to the "what" of a program, including its reach and fidelity. Data sources may already exist or involve a new collection process.

- **Qualitative data** (e.g., interviews, focus groups or observations) can help answer "how" and "why" something happens. For example, if you have a research question related to participants' perception of a program, you could collect qualitative data via focus groups.

Evaluations and Equity: Beware Biases

Any evaluation approach has the potential to incorporate biases, whether explicit or implicit. For example, measures might emphasize aspects of outcomes that are important to researchers over those that are important to community members.

It is important to consider the context in which your program is operating, the population it aims to serve and potential biases of those designing and carrying out the evaluation. As discussed in Chapter 3, engaging the community throughout the evaluation from design to interpretation of findings can help counter potential biases.
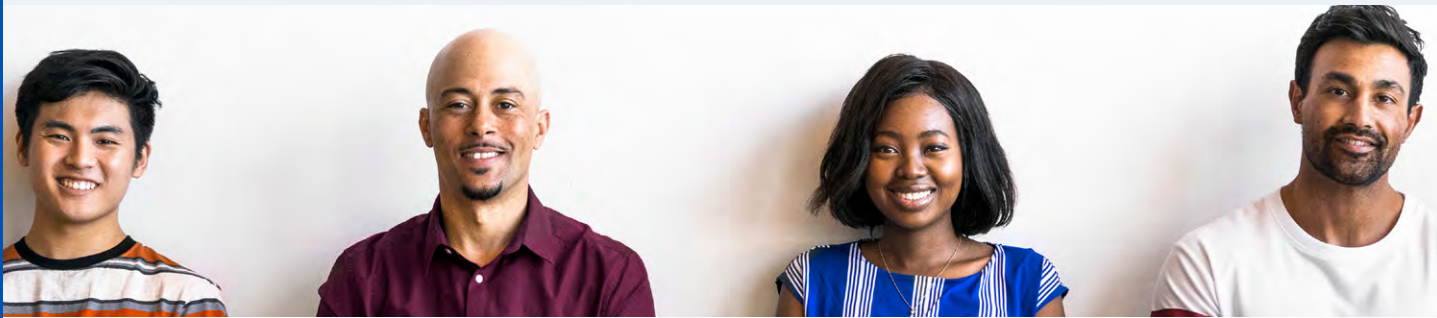
The following table details different types of process evaluations.

Process Evaluations: Three Types		
Light Touch	**Focused Evaluation**	**Comprehensive**
• May focus on a specific aspect of one service • Primarily uses one form of data (e.g. administrative data) • Research questions may be broad and exploratory • Seeks to gather information that could be used to improve program implementation in the future (e.g., reach)	• May focus on one service that is part of a broader program • Develops and uses several simple data collection instruments (e.g., survey, focus groups) • Aims to assess a few select dimensions of implementation (e.g., adaptation, acceptability)	• May focus on the full suite of services provided as part of a program • Develops and uses multiple data collection instruments to capture nuance in how services are tailored to different participants • Aims to assess multiple dimensions of implementation and may help identify opportunities for further evaluation

Learn even more about the evaluation methodologies that exist as you consider different process and impact evaluation opportunities (Theory Based, Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method) in [Results for America's Workforce Spending Guide](#).

Step 5: Develop an Evaluation Plan

Once research questions and an evaluation approach have been chosen, it's time to plan how you will design, implement and monitor your evaluation. This plan will help determine when the evaluation will be conducted and by whom.

Dive into the details, relying on the knowledge of your organization's experts to make sure that your evaluation is rigorous. Developing the plan may involve answering questions such as:

- **Who is included and excluded from our sample? How might this affect results?**

- **What data needs to be collected? How will it be collected, analyzed and reported?**

- **What might go wrong or prevent the evaluation results from being valid?**

Using a theory of change as the basis for your evaluation plan will set the stage for a successful impact evaluation. It will provide a clear framework of the program's elements from needs and inputs to outputs and outcomes, and guide the identification of causal pathways for an informed and effective evaluation process.

Note that developing an evaluation plan is an iterative process. You may need to refine research questions or exact outcome measures as you learn more about data availability, for example.

Also, different types of evaluations require different types of details. Whereas an impact evaluation plan may focus on data requirements, for example, a qualitative process evaluation plan may focus on developing focus group scripts. Consider developing a protocol to document important aspects of your evaluation.

Many federal agencies have published instructive examples of evaluation plans, which are collected here. Here are good places to start:

- **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's**
  Annual Evaluation Plan — Fiscal Year 2024

- **U.S. Department of Education's**
  Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Evaluation and Evidence-Building Plan

- **U.S. Agency for International Development's**
  Annual Evaluation Plan Fiscal Year 2024

A Learning Journey

As you take the steps detailed in this chapter, remember that building your evaluation practice is a continuous journey. With each evaluation, you will gain valuable experience. While challenges may arise along the way, approach them with a sense of curiosity and a growth mindset. Embrace the opportunity for learning and growth, knowing that with time and dedication, your organization can foster a culture of learning and make a lasting impact.

Ultimately, the evidence produced by effective evaluation practices should be used to improve programs and services and advance equitable outcomes. Evidence should also be used to inform key funding decisions — the focus of Chapter 7.

Exercise 6: Identify Opportunities in Your Organization

Use this worksheet to identify departments that may be interested in partnering with you to conduct an evaluation project. Then prioritize evaluation opportunities based on impact and feasibility.

Step 1. Brainstorm departments that may be interested in partnering with you to conduct an evaluation project.

What are some of the most pressing challenges departments are currently facing to serve residents? What are departments' current strategic goals?

	Name of Department and Policy, Program or Initiative to Evaluate	Strategic Goals
Example	**Dept. of Corrections / the City's Parole Process:** They have a new monitoring system for parolees and are interested in determining whether it's an improvement, and how it impacts parole period completion.	• Digital transformation • Modernizing corrections / administration of justice
Idea 1		
Idea 2		
Idea 3		

Step 2. For each idea, determine the following:

	Idea 1	Idea 2	Idea 3
VISIBILITY AND IMPORTANCE: Is this idea integral to achieving the leadership team's strategic priorities? Does the program to be evaluated serve a large portion of the population?			
POTENTIAL IMPACT: Is this an area of work where there is an identified need for improvement? Who is served by the program or policy?			
CAPACITY & COMMITMENT: Does the department have capacity to support an evaluation? If not, could duties be shifted to prioritize evaluation? Are department leaders and staff enthusiastic about an evaluation?			

Step 3. Prioritize ideas based on impact and feasibility.

Could this idea provide information that is...	Idea 1	Idea 2	Idea 3
meaningful?			
actionable			
novel?			
Is this idea feasible from a...	Idea 1	Idea 2	Idea 3
capacity perspective?			
timing perspective?			
technical perspective?			
Prioritizing Opportunities	Idea 1	Idea 2	Idea 3
Which two opportunities should you choose?			

Chapter 7

Making Evidence-Based Funding Decisions

Why This Matters

The ultimate goal of establishing an evaluation policy and conducting evaluations is to drive policy and program change based on evidence of what works. Evidence-based funding decisions are crucial to this change process. But for such decisions to become routine, funding processes must ask for evidence of effectiveness and/or request evaluations.

There is evidence showing that this motivates behavior change: In one state's survey, 97% of legislative and executive branch policymakers reported that having access to program effectiveness data is an important part of their decision-making. But only about half were satisfied with the information they currently have access to.

The impact of billions of dollars is dependent on decision-makers having access to high-quality information on program effectiveness. Changing budget templates, instructions, reports and summaries to include and lift up evidence can provide timely access to this information and route funding to "what works." A 2023 survey of state government decision makers showed that they are 22% more likely to select a proposal with an "evidence-based" label than the same proposal without this label.

This chapter provides strategies, tools and examples to inform the creation of decision-making frameworks that value and seek evidence. To become the new normal, these processes should be embedded in institutional funding practices, acting as a bridge linking evidence of impacts on outcomes and equity to real-world change.

Nevada's Department of Education did just that in recent years, seizing the opportunity presented by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The Department, which allocates most federal and state grants to school districts and schools across the state, harnessed ESSA's evidence provisions to power change. In just a few years, it became the fastest-improving state in the nation in terms of K-12 student achievement.

Bringing Evidence and Evaluation Details Into Budget Processes

Budget and funding decisions are a great place for an institution to commit to conducting evaluations and using evidence of effectiveness. Consider asking for the evidence basis and evidence-building opportunities throughout the budget development and decision-making process. (You can also consider requiring or incentivizing funding of evidence-based strategies in grant programs.)

Specifically:

Create space for this information on your budget forms, reports, memos and slide decks.

Add a field in budget development forms for proposing evaluations and/or citing evidence from evaluations.

Develop an annual reporting process for departments to identify any new or additional investments in evidence-based initiatives and in impact evaluations.

Establish a system to track your overall investment in evidence-based initiatives, year-over-year.

To drive equitable outcomes, require that evaluation findings are reported by sub-populations.

To effectively build your policy into each budget request, request that agencies provide:

- the current evidence level for the program or activity being proposed.

- a brief description of the evidence. This may include:

  → the program or activity's objectives and theory of change.

  → types of data collected on the program's activities and performance;

  → findings from any evaluation (formal or informal) conducted using that data;

  → any return on investment (or similar metrics) that has been calculated for the program, and calculation details;

  → information about whether the program is based on similar programs in other jurisdictions that have been evaluated and the results of those evaluations, including citations;

  → Citations to relevant research (either internal or external), if available; and

  → If none of the above has occurred to date, how the agency plans to begin collecting and/or evaluating data on the program.

An Array of Evidence-Based Activities

Remember that evidence can support a wide range of activities — not only budgeting decisions, the focus of this chapter. Consider how decision-making processes in the following areas could evolve to seek out and value evidence:

- **Grantmaking/grant solicitations (RFPs, NOFOs, NOFAs)**

- **Strategic planning**

- **Employee training**

- **Program design**

- **Contract/vendor management**

Strategies for Change

When retooling budgeting processes, it's important to think carefully about how funding decisions should or should not be tied to the existence of evidence or evidence-building activities. In an ideal world, established evidence bases or evidence-building activities would exist for all policies and proposed programs. That's a ways off for many organizations — but the budgeting process can help create that future by incentivizing evaluations.
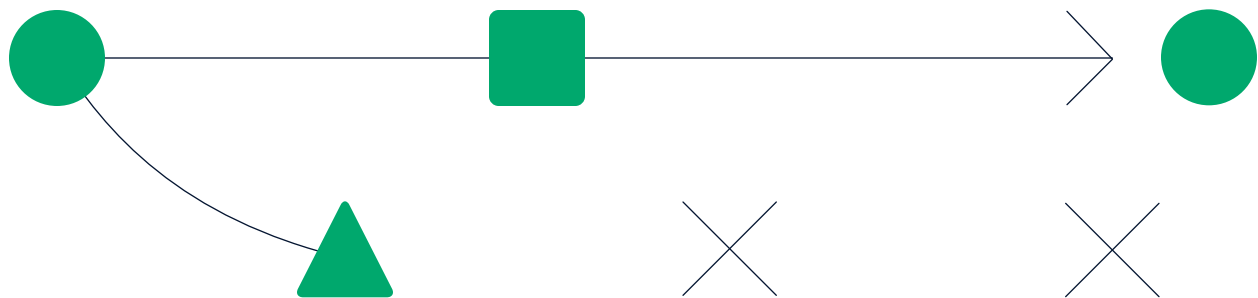
Decide if you want to use funding decision processes to identify, incentivize or require evidence use and evidence building. The strategy you choose will motivate different behaviors. It will likely depend on the organization's evaluation policy, the maturity of its evaluation practices and its change management strategy. The level of internal buy-in to evaluations and evidence-building can also impact which of the following strategies you choose.

Strategy 1

Require evidence-based interventions or programs

Require that funding be given to support evidence-based interventions or programs that include evidence-building activities. This could include:

- having the entire program budget (or grant) go to an evidence-based strategy;

- setting aside a certain portion of funding that will only go to evidence-based strategies; and

- developing and providing a list of evidence-based interventions (based on relevant clearinghouses) to choose from.

Strategy 2

Prefer evidence use through point allocation system

Allocate points to funding requests (or grant applications) that meet chosen evidence definitions or include plans to build evidence. Possible allocation approaches include:

- dedicated base points (e.g., 10 of 100 points are awarded based on evidence of effectiveness)

- bonus points (e.g., up to 15 additional points are awarded based on evidence of effectiveness)

Strategy 3

Encourage evidence use and evidence-building practices

Require that funding request submissions (or grant applications) identify any evidence use and evidence-building activities that support programs in order to encourage these practices.

- Agencies (or grant-seeking organizations) include the information on forms, reports and other funding request-related materials.

- This information is provided to budget decision-makers, who use discretion in how it influences their funding decisions.

A Budget Submission Example From Colorado

In 2021, the State of Colorado set detailed requirements for incorporating evidence into the state budget process. Part of the budget submission template includes the following table, which the Colorado Department of Agriculture completed as part of a submission for funding for its Agricultural Drought and Climate Resilience Office.

Logic Model/ Theory of Change	Colorado Agriculture will adopt more comprehensive practices if proper technical assistance is provided and targeted economic and regulatory incentives are employed.		
Program Objective	Ensure that Colorado Agriculture is prepared, resilient and adaptive.		
Outputs Being Measured	Anticipated, no data yet collected: # of Colorado agricultural businesses that have adopted greenhouse gas reducing practices, the department may offer Y workshops with Z attendance each year. # of incentives adopted by businesses.		
Outcomes Being Measured	Anticipated, baseline not yet established: Greenhouse gases emitted by agribusiness will decline by X% over Y years.		
Cost/Benefit Ratio	N/A		
Evaluations	**Pre-Post**	**Quasi-Experimental Design**	**Randomized Control Trial**
Results of Evaluation	TBD: Our Pre-Evaluation will identify how many tons of CO_2 agriculture in Colorado is producing. In Y years we will measure this output to see if a change has occurred.	N/A	N/A
Continuum Level	Step 1		
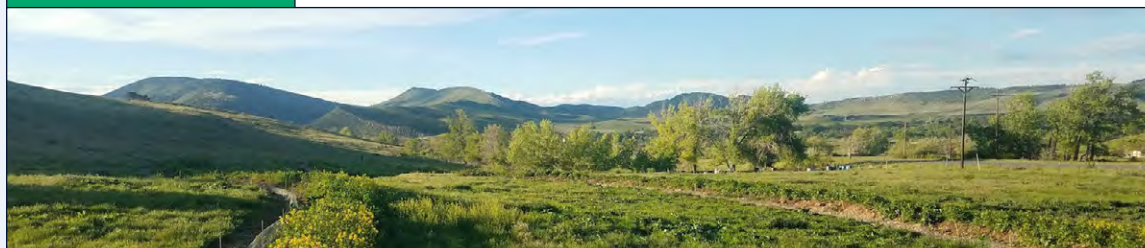
Powering Change

A strong evidence base for a policy or program is just a starting point for positive change. To power on-the-ground change, governments need to update processes so that any evidence (or lack thereof) supporting an approach is integrated into funding or other decisions.

Funding decision processes requiring evidence and evaluation-related information can drive change in both directions. Most importantly, they drive real-world change by helping to allocate funding to policies and programs that deliver results, improving the lives of constituents and their communities. But funding processes can also spur important organizational change. By incentivizing evidence and evidence-building activities, they can help build a better governing environment, one in which policies and programs are only funded on the basis of established evidence bases.

That future will take years to build. New funding processes are an essential building block for change.

Exercise 7: Build an Evidence-Based Funding Request Framework

Develop your own framework for integrating evidence base and evaluation details into a request process:

Practice Complete the below framework using a currently funded program example.

Adjust What would you keep, what would you change? Keep your organization's evaluation policy and practices in mind as you tweak this framework.

Pilot Select a team or program to test your framework. Make adjustments based on the results and your experience.

Embed Make a plan to incorporate the final framework into the funding request submission and budget process.

Request Framework

Requesting Department or Agency	
Program/Initiative	
Program Objective	
Theory of Change	**Has one been developed or is there a plan to develop one?**
Outcomes Being Measured	
Target Population(s)	

Expected Impact	**Estimated outcome measure in Y period of time with and without the program/initiative in place**. *Example: In 2026, we estimate that 85% of 3rd graders will be reading at grade level. With this proposal, we expect this outcome measure to increase 3 percentage points to 88%.*
Evidence-Based Strategy	**Does the planned program already have an evidence-base?** *Example: Leveled Literacy for first and second graders.*
Source(s) of Evidence	**Clearinghouses? Individual studies? (with links),** *Example: U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse, Tier 1*
Evidence Rating	**Based on your jurisdiction's evidence definition.** *Example: "Evidence-based"*

	If there is no evidence-base:			
Evaluation Plans	**Type of Evaluation**	**Research Partner**	**Equity & Validity Considerations**	**Evaluation Budget**
Community Engagement Plan	**Who will you engage? How, when and for what purpose?**			

Building a Culture of Evidence and Evaluation
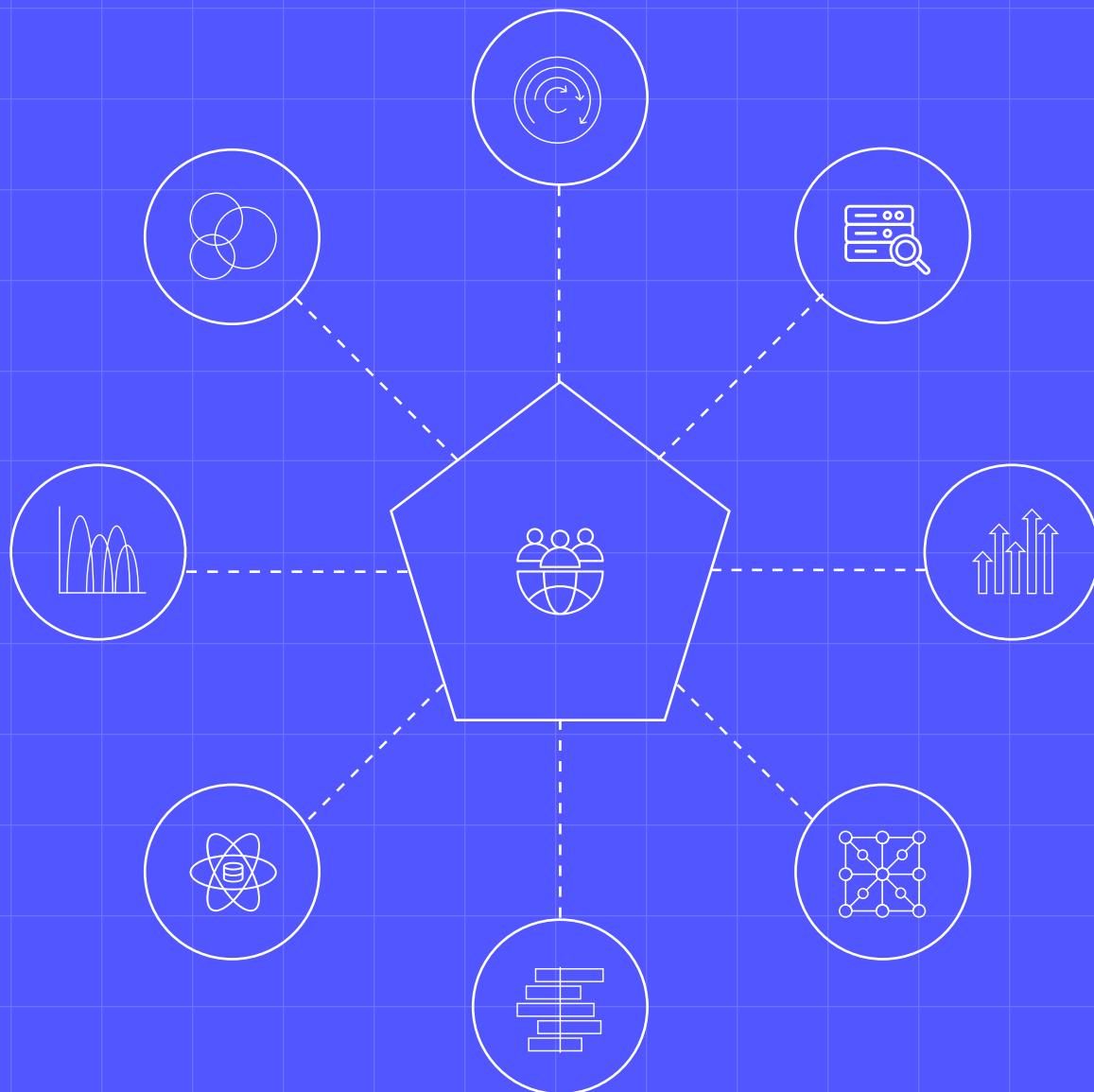
Why This Matters

Building and sustaining an equity-focused culture of evidence and evaluation is critical in a public-sector organization for a few reasons.

A culture of evidence and evaluation promotes accountability and transparency. By assessing the effectiveness of their initiatives, organizations can identify areas for improvement and make evidence-based adjustments. This fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement, while also providing stakeholders with insights into the organization's activities and outcomes, and building trust in government.

Integrating an equity approach in government activities is essential for promoting fairness and social justice. It is important to recognize the diverse needs and challenges faced by different groups. By collecting and analyzing data disaggregated by demographic factors such as race, gender and socioeconomic status, organizations can identify disparities and develop strategies to address them. This helps to reduce inequality, ensure equal access to public services and promote social inclusion.

The Three Prongs of Culture

Building an equity-focused culture requires sustained and formal commitments across three areas that support evaluation activities and the use of evidence.

Vision & Commitment	Structures & Resources	Skills & Knowledge
Including: • leadership's vision for evaluation • evaluation policy (see Chapter 4) and other public commitments • how the organization mobilizes resources to support the vision	**Including:** • staffing • data systems • tools and software • internal processes • relationships between evaluation and program staff, and external stakeholders	**Including the ability to:** • identify and prioritize opportunities • use different evaluation methods • analyze data and using results • engage partners and community members in evaluations

Change Behaviors, Build the Culture

The "COM-B" model is a comprehensive framework for understanding human and organizational behavior, and designing solutions to drive targeted change.[20] COM-B stands for "Capability, Opportunity and Motivation-Behavior." It suggests that behavior is influenced by three key components:

Capability An individual or organization's capacity to engage in a specific behavior. It includes both the knowledge and skills required to perform the behavior. Funding and staffing levels impact this area.

Opportunity External factors that enable or constrain behaviors. It includes environmental and social factors such as social norms, physical context and access to resources.

Motivation - Behavior The cognitive and/or emotional processes that energize individuals and direct behavior.

The COM-B model serves as a valuable framework for discussing the steps needed to establish an organizational culture that values evidence, evaluation and equity. It can address barriers to culture change and develop strategies to address them.

Build Capability

Consider opportunities to build evaluation-related knowledge and skills within your organization. You may begin by identifying any clear knowledge or skill gaps related to evidence-based practices and evaluation, and equity-focused approaches. These can be identified via conversations with your internal teams, evaluation partners and leaders within your organization.

Use this assessment process to understand the areas that need improvement and develop resources to enhance the capability of employees in these areas. For example:

- **Training and Development:** Provide training programs or workshops to enhance employees' skills and knowledge related to equitable evaluation methods, techniques and data analysis. For example, those trained in evaluation within your organization could design and run multi-week training series that teach staff how to conduct an impact or process evaluation (see Chapter 6) and apply findings.

  Consider bringing in external trainers to enhance evaluators' ability to conduct evaluations with an equity lens.

  Also consider creating an evaluation "community of practice" (CoP) that brings a group together to share knowledge, experiences and best practices related to evaluation. These networks allow individuals interested in evaluation to exchange ideas and learn from each other, without necessarily requiring any investment in organizational resources. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management, for example, established a Research Community of Practice to build cross-organizational connections and knowledge transfer among the organization's research, evaluation and statistics experts.

- **Resources and Tools:** To complement hands-on training and development, ensure that employees are aware of and have access to resources and tools to conduct evaluations. This may include software (e.g., data analysis and visualization tools), data collection instruments, evaluation tools (e.g., frameworks and templates), and contracting capabilities (e.g., funds to hire external evaluators).

Identify Capability Barriers	
Awareness	Are staff aware of the evaluation options available?
Knowledge	Do staff understand evaluation and know how to do it?
Interpersonal Skills	Do staff have the interpersonal skills (e.g., relationships, buy-in) to collaborate on evaluations?
Interest	Will evaluation projects capture and hold staff attention? Are staff enthusiastic or excited about evaluation opportunities?
The Big Picture	Do we understand the historical and systemic conditions that may be influencing the current state?

Build Opportunity

It is important to create an environment that enables and encourages evaluation practices. To do so, first identify longer-term organizational goals that evaluation practices will support. Work with relevant internal and external stakeholders to better understand the needs of your organization and the people it serves, and ensure broad input is captured in planning efforts. Then begin identifying and building appropriate mechanisms to support evaluation-focused commitments. These can be public-facing declarations or internal directives to provide guidance within your organization.

Mechanisms that help create an environment conducive to evaluation include:

- **A designated evaluation function.** An evaluation function is a formally designated team or group of individuals responsible for scoping, designing and conducting evaluations within your organization. Its purpose is to undertake and execute useful, high-quality evaluations of programs, policies and practices.[21] The state of Tennessee, for example, created a Chief Evaluation Officer position in its FY23 budget dedicated to leading the creation of agency and state learning agendas and administering new dedicated funding for program evaluations.

  While setting up the evaluation function, it is important to actively involve stakeholders from underrepresented groups in planning and decision-making. Seek their input and experiences to ensure their needs inform your practice.

- **An evaluation agenda.** This is a one-or multi-year plan that summarizes your organization's evaluation needs and identifies priority community-facing activities. Evaluation experts within your organization could develop the agenda, based on consultation within and outside the organization. It is most effective when created collaboratively across your organization, including not only evaluation staff but also program and policy staff.

- **Steady funding for evaluation activities**. Establish a standard annual funding allocation or modify budget guidance to build the organization's capacity to evaluate programs.

    → **Funding:** Organizations can create a standard funding allocation within their budget to build evaluation capacity. Results for America encourages governments to allocate at least 1% of discretionary program funds for evaluations. (Grants to encourage evidence-building activities can also be pursued.) Examples of state governments that allocate at least 1% of funding in this way can be found here.

    → **Budget guidance:** Organizations can modify or leverage existing budget decision-making processes to introduce evaluation or evidence as a funding requirement.

Taken together, these mechanisms can institutionalize evaluation practices and priorities, helping to create new cultural norms in the organization.

Identify Opportunity Barriers	
Work Environment	Does the environment encourage or discourage evaluation?
Resources & Time	Do staff members have the resources and the time needed to evaluate?
Social & Cultural Norms	Does the jurisdiction typically evaluate? Will staff be perceived negatively or are evaluations perceived negatively? How might peers influence evaluation behavior?
Lack of Role Models	Are there people in the jurisdiction who can model and encourage evaluation?

Build Motivation

To build motivation for evaluation, generate buy-in and enthusiasm.

- **Articulate the purpose and benefits.** Help staff to understand why evaluation is important and how it adds value. Highlight potential benefits including evidence-based decision-making, program improvement, identifying and addressing systemic barriers, and more equitable outcomes.

- **Share success stories that demonstrate positive impacts.** Highlight how evaluation findings enhance program outcomes and inform policy changes.

  Consider providing a platform where individuals and/or teams can showcase their evaluation work and share innovative ideas, and encourage others to contribute.

- **Tailor the message to different stakeholders.** Understand the interests and priorities of various stakeholders and tailor communication accordingly (see Chapter 5's stakeholder mapping discussion). Emphasize how evaluation can contribute to their success.

  Ensure that communication efforts reach and resonate with diverse stakeholders, including marginalized or underrepresented groups.

- **Create a "new normal."** Establish clear expectations that the use of evidence and evaluation is crucial for informed decision-making, and that an equity lens is required to ensure fair and equitable outcomes. Encourage leadership role modeling by asking champions of evaluation to be active in their outreach. High-profile champions — such as a mayor or governor, department heads or budget director — can be especially helpful in driving a culture shift.

  The State of Pennsylvania, for example, in 2023 created the Commonwealth Chief Transformation Officer (CTO) role to enhance Pennsylvania's ability to evaluate policy and process for efficiency and effectiveness. The CTO has the ability to convene multiple agencies and stakeholders, both public and private, for evaluations.

- **Use informal rewards to encourage evaluation practices and celebrate success.** Recognition and appreciation can be in the form of public commendations, certificates or informal accolades that highlight a commitment to evaluation.

- **Foster a learning culture.** Emphasize that evaluation is not about blame or judgment but about gaining insights and identifying areas for learning and growth.

Consider providing informal mentorship or coaching opportunities so that experienced evaluators can support and guide colleagues who are new to evaluation. This can accelerate learning and build confidence. Also, informal opportunities such as lunch-and-learn sessions or other discussion forums can offer people a chance to share their evaluation experiences, insights and lessons learned.

Identify Motivation Barriers	
Confidence	Does the environment encourage or discourage evaluation?
Impact	Do staff believe evaluations… • will lead to a positive (or negative) outcome? • will have a significant impact?
Goals	Is there a clear goal or target? Is the goal a priority?
Identity	Do evaluation activities align with how staff see themselves?
Emotions	How do staff feel when evaluating? How do staff feel about evaluation?
Habit	Is it a habit?
Accountability	Who will hold staff accountable?

A Long-Term Change Process

Cultivating a culture of evidence and evaluation focused on equity is a long-term endeavor requiring time and commitment. If your organization is just starting out on its culture-building journey, the process can be overwhelming. Try starting with just a few key areas and then gradually expand efforts. You may be surprised as waves of change and new cultural norms spark a self-reinforcing cycle of growth and improvement.

As you work to build and sustain the culture, remember to leverage existing strengths and resources. An organizational assessment can help identify areas of strength and build upon them, making the cultural transformation more manageable. With dedication, you can build a culture that embraces evidence and evaluation to help make the communities in which your agency works more equitable.

Exercise 8: Assess Your Organization's Evaluation Stage

This assessment tool is based on our understanding of what it takes to establish a culture of evaluation in state, tribal and local government. This assessment is not a report card — think of it as an organizational learning tool. There are no "good" or "bad" scores. By illuminating strengths and areas for development, the assessment is designed to be a conversation starter that facilitates brainstorms about improving evaluation capacity.

Instructions

Answer the following questions to get a sense of your organization's current strengths and challenges. Then use the scoring rubric to score the organization.

Want to go deeper? Use the [complete version](#) of this assessment tool, which includes more detailed questions pertaining to leadership and vision, organizational structures and resources, and knowledge and skills.

Part 1: Questions

Select the statement that best describes your organization's current evaluation practice.

1. **Which of the following statements best describes your organization?**

    a. Evaluations rarely take place, but when they do, the results are not used to inform decisions on programs or policies in the organization or department.

    b. Some evaluations are happening, and the results are being used to improve the delivery of indicated programs.

    c. Evaluations are consistently used to make decisions and improvements to existing programs. Some evaluations may be starting to examine strategic questions that inform program or policy design, but these are not yet conducted consistently or systematically.

    d. The organization regularly conducts evaluations and takes meaningful action, including shifting dollars or changing programs, policy or laws, in response to evidence generated through evaluations.

2. **Which of the following statements best describes your organization?**

    a. The organization has no formal or informal guidance about when and why to conduct evaluations and has no public commitment to evaluation.

    b. The organization has some formal or informal guidance on when and why to conduct evaluations, but it may differ across departments.

    c. The organization has made formal commitments to conducting evaluation and using evidence (e.g. a policy on evaluation or evidence use, an evaluation agenda). These commitments are supported by the organization leadership.

    d. The organization leadership sets evaluation goals and has a public-facing learning agenda that outlines how evaluation can identify and impact outcomes that matter for residents. The organization supports carrying out evaluations by making funding or other resources available.

3. **Which of the following statements best describes your organization?**

    a. Staff are not equipped to conduct evaluation activities and seldom engage external evaluation partners.

    b. The organization has staff with basic data & analysis literacy and may have an individual who is comfortable running some types of evaluations. Some staff have the skills to ask for external support and help facilitate more complex evaluation with outside experts.

    c. The organization has a few core staff who are comfortable running some evaluations (e.g. low to moderate complexity) and generating insights from the results. Program staff feel comfortable participating in evaluation projects. Senior staff understand how to use evidence in decision making. The organization has engaged in successful partnerships with evaluators for complex evaluations.

    d. The organization has a number of staff (or formal external evaluation partners) with the tools and skills to successfully conduct most types of rigorous evaluations in-house, and effectively share the results and recommendations to inform policy/program changes. The organization often partners successfully with external evaluators for more complex evaluation needs.

4. **Which of the following statements best describes your organization?**

    a. Evaluations only take place when and where they are required by external stakeholders.

    b. The organization runs evaluations as existing capacity and funding allows, on a department-by-department (or project-by-project) basis.

    c. Our organization makes a good faith effort to prioritize evaluation projects within and across departments or initiatives, based on their alignment with policy priorities and/or upcoming decision points.

    d. Evaluations are conducted in alignment with the organization's policy agenda and priorities. Projects are designed with research questions that matter to residents and can positively impact resident outcomes.

5. **Which of the following statements best describes your organization?**

    a. Evaluation results are rarely shared beyond the department or office where they were conducted.

    b. Evaluation results are shared within relevant departments, and may be shared across departments, but are rarely shared externally.

    c. All evaluation results are shared internally across departments to inform policy and program design, but may not be consistently shared externally.

    d. Relevant evaluation results are shared internally across departments to inform policy and program design, and externally to influence evidence-based practices of stakeholders and to contribute to the evidence base on what works.

Part 2: Scoring Your Evaluation Stage

For each of the five questions above, assign yourself a score.

- For each question you answered 'a', give yourself 1 point.

- For each question you answered 'b', give yourself 2 points.

- For each question you answered 'c', give yourself 3 points.

- For each question you answered 'd', give yourself 4 points.

Your organization's overall **evaluation stage score** is an average of your scores to the five questions rounded to the nearest integer. The final score should be 1, 2, 3, or 4, which correspond to four evaluation stages detailed below:

- 1: Emerging

- 2: Opportunistic

- 3: Meaningful Investment

- 4: Culture of Evaluation

Emerging Evaluation Stage

At this stage, you may not be conducting many evaluations yet but you're starting to lay the groundwork for how you want to use evaluations to pursue your jurisdiction's goals and policy priorities.

To continue building your evaluation capacity and move to the next stage, consider building support and enthusiasm for evaluation at the leadership level. Assess how much buy-in leadership has for evaluation activities currently and identify potential champions. Identify proof-of-concept evaluation projects to conduct. Use those projects to put together a compelling case for why and how evaluation can help your city's leadership reach its goals.

Opportunistic Evaluation Stage

At this stage, it's likely that some evaluations are happening in your jurisdiction as the opportunity arises, and that the results are being used to improve the delivery of those programs and inform important decisions.

If evaluation projects are happening on a case-by-case basis, your next step will be to think about how evaluations can be planned more consistently and systematically across programs and departments. Continue to build skills in your staff members to lead, manage and conduct evaluations, including building an appreciation for the benefits of evaluation within program staff and departments and assisting them in identifying opportunities to use evaluation to answer burning questions. Work with leadership to establish more formal commitments to evaluation to incentivize these projects.

Meaningful Investments Evaluation Stage

At this stage, your jurisdiction is likely planning and executing a diverse set of evaluations across departments and programs. You're able to effectively prioritize evaluation projects, choosing ones that generate evidence on research questions that directly impact important resident outcomes. They inform decisions on how programs are implemented, and whether or not programs achieve their intended outcomes.
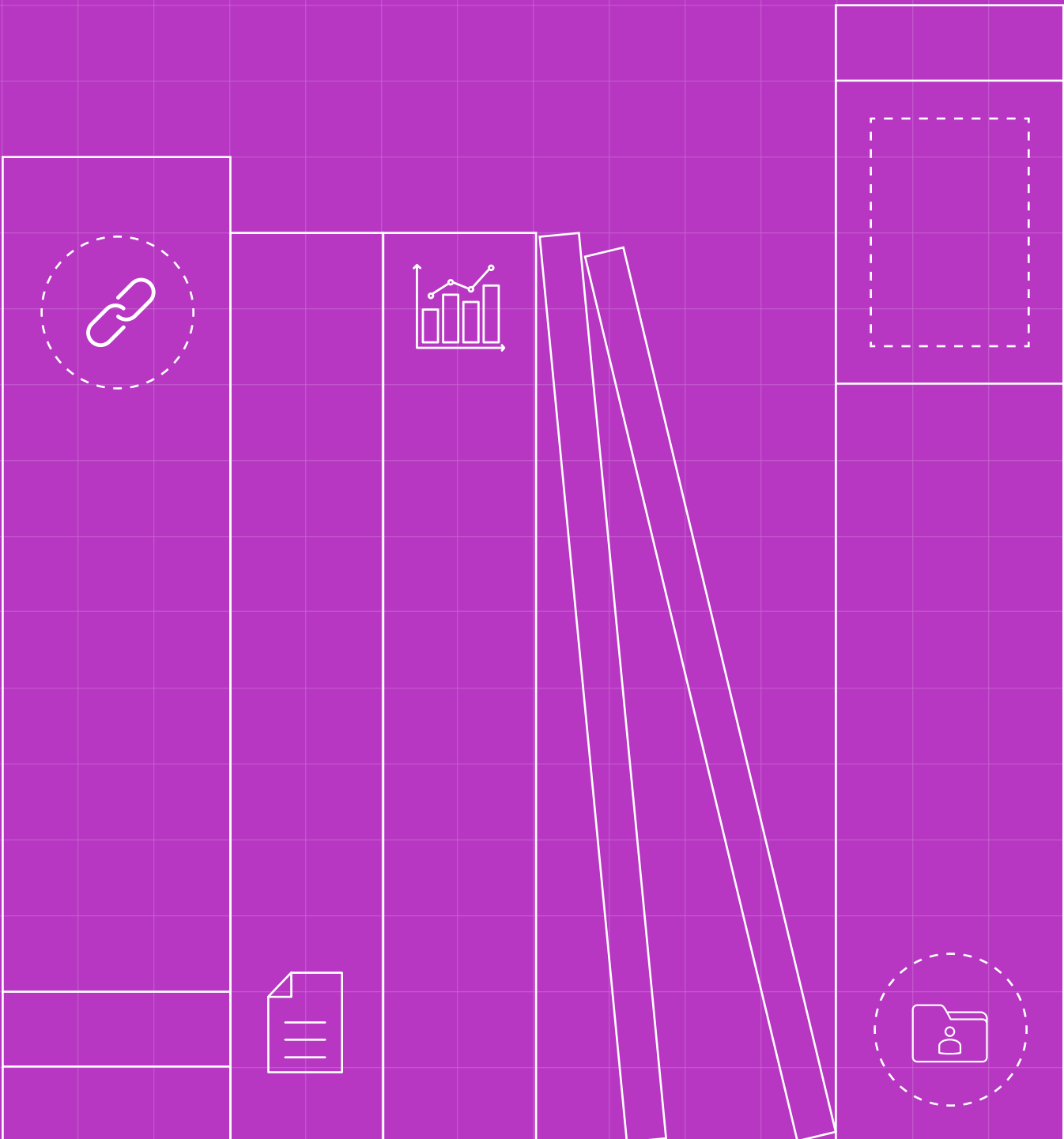
To firmly establish a culture of evaluation, ensure that evaluation results are consistently translated into meaningful action, including shifting dollars or changing programs, policy or laws, in response to evidence generated through evaluations. Evaluation results should also be consistently shared externally to help influence partners and organization-wide agendas. Continue to find ways to encourage evaluation activities, like establishing mechanisms that require evidence use in programmatic and/or budgetary decision making.

Culture of Evaluation Stage

Congratulations! High-quality evaluation projects are taking place throughout the program lifecycle and generating evidence that is useful to policymakers, informs decision-making and makes a meaningful difference for resident outcomes. Evaluation learnings inform policy objectives and policy design, implementation considerations and budgeting and continuation decisions. Learnings are shared with internal and external stakeholders to inform their practices.

At this stage, it's important to sustain your jurisdiction's evaluation capacity. Continually revise your organization's evaluation agenda and keep it up-to-date to reflect strategic priorities. When you experience staff turnover, ensure that key positions are filled and that new staff are onboarded to evaluation practices and requirements in your organization. As a leader in evaluation, find ways to share your experience with other jurisdictions interested in building their evaluation capacity.

Additional Resources and Endnotes

Ready to learn more about how evidence and evaluations can power equitable change? The following resources written by experts working in universities, nonprofits organizations and governments are good places to deepen your knowledge.

Chapter 1: Defining Evidence of Effectiveness

"Definitions of 'Evidence-Based Program' and 'Evidence-Building Program,'" Results for America (2024).

Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance, White House (July 12, 2019).

"The Promise of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act and Proposed Next Steps," Results for America (2019).

Economic Mobility Catalog, Results for America.

Developing a Theory of Change, Annie E. Casey Foundation (2022).

"Theory of Change & Measurement," Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (2023).

Next Generation Evidence, Project Evident.

Chapter 2: Defining Equity

"To Budget for Equity, Cities First Must Define Equity," Anjali Chainani (May 11, 2021); Route-Fifty.com.

"Why Am I Always Being Researched?" Chicago Beyond (2019).

"The Equitable Evaluation Framework," Equity Evaluation Initiative (May 22, 2023).

"What's the Role of Equity in Evaluation Policy?" Mary Ellen Wiggins and Alex Sileo (February 2020); The Forum for Youth Investment.

"Defining Equity in Federal Government Evaluations," Office of Evaluation Sciences (2022); U.S. General Services Administration.

"The Basics of Equity in Budgeting," Shayne Kavanagh and Jake Kowalski (February 2021); *Government Finance Review.*

"Ethics and Empathy in Using Imputation to Disaggregate Data for Racial Equity: Recommendations and Standards Guide," Urban Institute (July 2021).

Chapter 3: The Power of Incorporating Community

"City Leader Guide on Civic Engagement: Designing Pathways for Participatory Problem-Solving," Hollie Russon Gilman, Jorrit de Jong, Archon Fung, Rebecca Rosen, Gaylen Moore (2023); Bloomberg Center for Cities at Harvard University.

"The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership," Rosa González (2019); Facilitating Power.

"Transformational Community Engagement to Advance Health Equity," Everette T.D., Sathasivam D., and Siegel K. (January 27, 2023); Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

"Advancing Equity Through Feedback," Leap of Reason Ambassadors Community.

"Design and Iterate Implementation Strategy," Louise Geraghty and Stephanie Lin (September 2021); J-PAL North America.

"Communicating With a Partner About Results," Laura Feeney (March 2021); J-PAL North America.

"Community Engagement Guide," King County, Washington (2011).

"Community Engagement Done Right," Nina Bennett and Anjali Chainani (November 29, 2021), What Works Cities.

"Nine Ways to Strengthen Program Evaluations by Centering Community Voice," Amelia Coffey (July 8, 2021), Urban Institute.

Chapter 4: Establishing an Evaluation Policy

"The Federal Evaluation Toolkit: Why Evaluate?" Evaluation.gov.

"2022 Invest in What Works Federal Standard of Excellence," Results for America (2022).

"Principles and Practices for Federal Program Evaluation," National Academies of Science (2017).

"Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices," Office of Management and Budget memorandum (March 2020).

"Evaluation Policies: Evaluation Policy by Agency," Evaluation.gov.

"Rigorous Evaluation," City of Philadelphia.

"An Evaluation Roadmap for a More Effective Government," American Evaluation Association (September 2019).

"Statement on Cultural Competence," American Evaluation Association (April 2011).

"Practical Strategies for Culturally Competent Evaluation: Evaluation Guide," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014).

Chapter 5: Adopting and Building Support for a Policy

"Effective Change Management in Equity Implementation," What Works Cities/ Results for America, Bloomberg Philanthropies and PFM (2022).

"ACF Evaluation Policy Introduction," Administration for Children and Families (November 9, 2021).

"LEVER: Building Your Team/Landscape Analysis," Results for America (2023).

"Evaluation Policy Practices Checklist," Results for America (2023).

Chapter 6: Leveraging Evaluation Opportunities

"How Can Governments Leverage Policy Evaluation to Improve Evidence Informed Policy Making? Highlights from an OECD Comparative Study," Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020).

"Evidence Capacity in Organizations: A Literature-Informed Framework," Administration for Children & Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (January 11, 2023).

"Staff Spotlight: Using Behavioral Insights and Evaluation," City of Portland (2021).

Chapter 7: Making Evidence-Based Funding Decisions

"2023 Invest in What Works State Standard of Excellence," Results for America (2023).

"Results First Clearinghouse Database," Penn State University.

"Economic Mobility Catalog," Results for America.

"Guide to Evidence-Based Clearinghouses," Midwest Comprehensive Center at American Institutes for Research.

"Understanding the Use of Evidence-based Practices by State Leaders and Staff: Current State, Challenges and Outlook," University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs (October 2023).

Chapter 8: Building a Culture of Evidence and Evaluation

"Shifting the Evaluation Paradigm: The Equitable Evaluation Framework," Equitable Evaluations Initiative and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (2021).

"Racial Equity Resource Guide," W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2014).

"What's Race Got to Do With It? Equity and Philanthropic Evaluation Practice," Jara Dean-Coffey (October 22, 2018), American Journal of Evaluation.
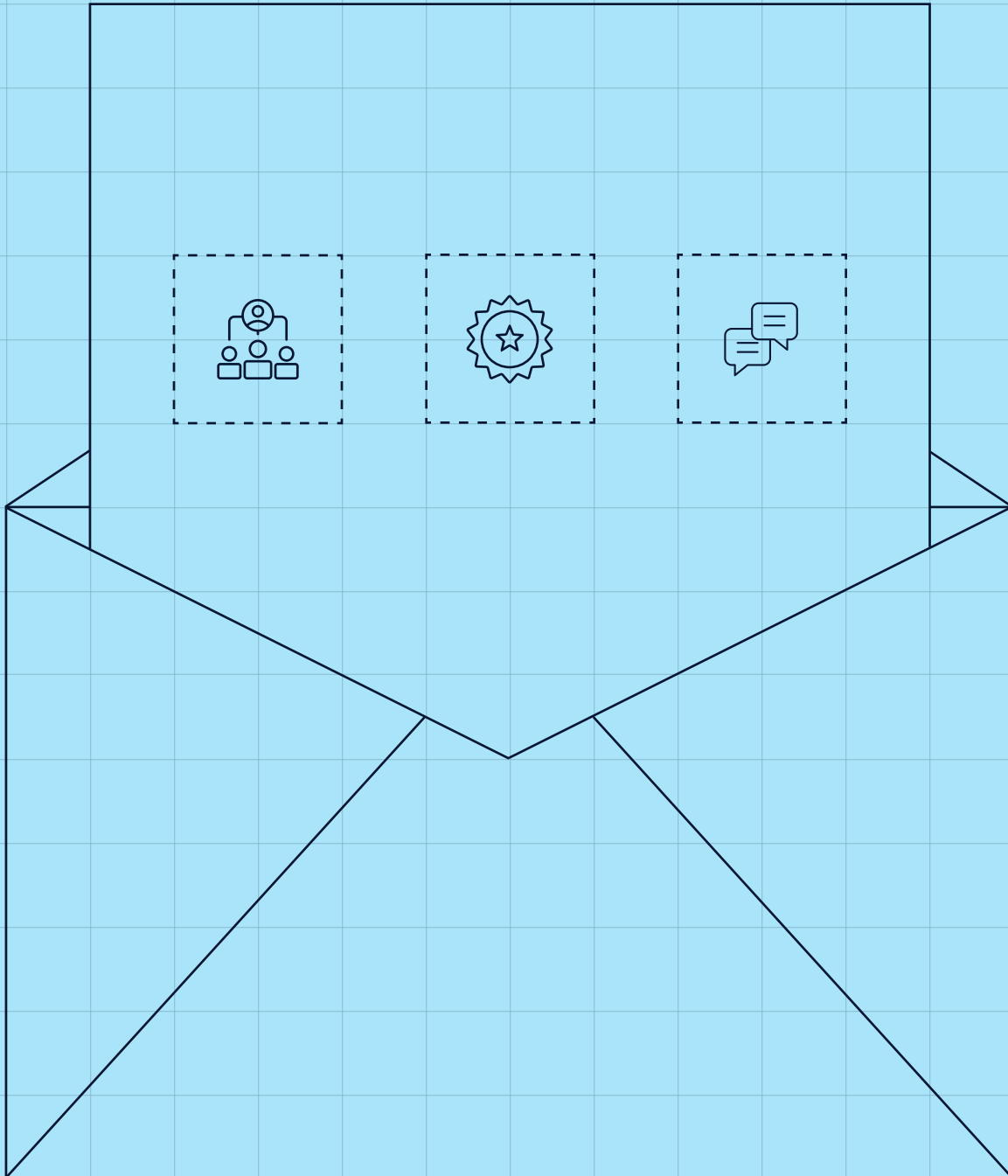
Endnotes

1   Results for America's <u>What Works Cities Certification</u> assessment benchmarks government
        practices across eight foundational areas, including evaluations.

2   <u>https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/M-20-12.pdf</u>

3   For more on this, see: <u>https://www.racialequityalliance.org/tools-resources/</u>

4   The table draws from this resource: <u>https://www.gfoa.org/equity</u>

5   Source: The White House, <u>Executive Order 13985</u>, *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for
        Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government* (January 20, 2021)

6   Source: City of Dallas, <u>Racial Equity Plan 2022-2023.</u>

7   Source: City of Long Beach, <u>Racial Equity and Reconciliation Initiative: Initial Report</u>
        (August 2020)

8   Source: PolicyLink, <u>The Equity Manifesto</u> (2015, 2018)

9   Source: Urban Sustainability Directors Network, <u>Equity in Sustainability: An Equity Scan of
        Local Government Sustainability Programs</u> (September 2014)

10   These questions draw on two resources: 1) The City of Madison, Wisconsin's <u>Racial Equity
        & Social Justice Initiative Public Participation Resource Guide</u>; 2) W.K. Kellogg Foundation's
        <u>"Doing Evaluation in Service of Racial Equity: Debunk Myths"</u>

11   <u>https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/enhancing-rigor-relevance-and-equity-research-and-
        evaluation-through-community.</u>

12   <u>https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/how-public-engagement-produces-more-accountable-
        and-effective-government</u>

        <u>https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/public-trust-in-government-1958-2023/</u>

13   Surveys are often associated with quantitative methods, but they can also include open-ended
        questions that allow respondents to share their thoughts and experiences in their own words.

14   Transparency should be a focus of community engagement efforts and evaluation policies —
        otherwise the principles do not overlap with the areas presented here.

15   For more on cultural competence and evaluations, see: <u>https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/
        viewcontent.cgi?article=1203&context=tfr</u>

16   These five standards, presented by OMB here, are similar to those adopted by several federal
        agencies such as the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health
        and Human Services, which established its evaluation policy in 2012.

Endnotes

17   Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices, OMB M-20-12, 2020

18   See Westat's Guidelines for Working with Third-Party Evaluators for guidance on how to work with external evaluation partners.

19   Source: What Works Cities/Results for America, "Effective Change Management in Equity Implementation,"

20   Michie, S., Van Stralen, M. M., & West, R. (2011). The behavior change wheel: A new method for characterizing and designing behavior change interventions. Implementation Science, 6(1).

21   For an example, see the City of Tempe, Arizona's Evaluation Policy, Section VI.5.

Acknowledgments

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

Results for America helps decision-makers at all levels of government harness the power of evidence and data to solve our world's greatest challenges. Our mission is to make investing in what works the "new normal," so that when policymakers make decisions, they start by seeking the best evidence and data available, then use what they find to get better results.

J-PAL ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL POVERTY ACTION LAB

The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) is a global research center working to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. Anchored by a network of more than 870 researchers at universities around the world, J-PAL conducts randomized impact evaluations to answer critical questions in the fight against poverty.

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The Behavioral Insights Team (BIT) is a world-leading research and evaluation agency that uses evidence to develop better systems, policies, products and services that improve people's lives. It has delivered 1,500+ projects, including 1,000+ randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental evaluations in 80 countries. By helping partners conduct rigorous but pragmatic evaluations, BIT improves decision making and delivers real impact on practical challenges.

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