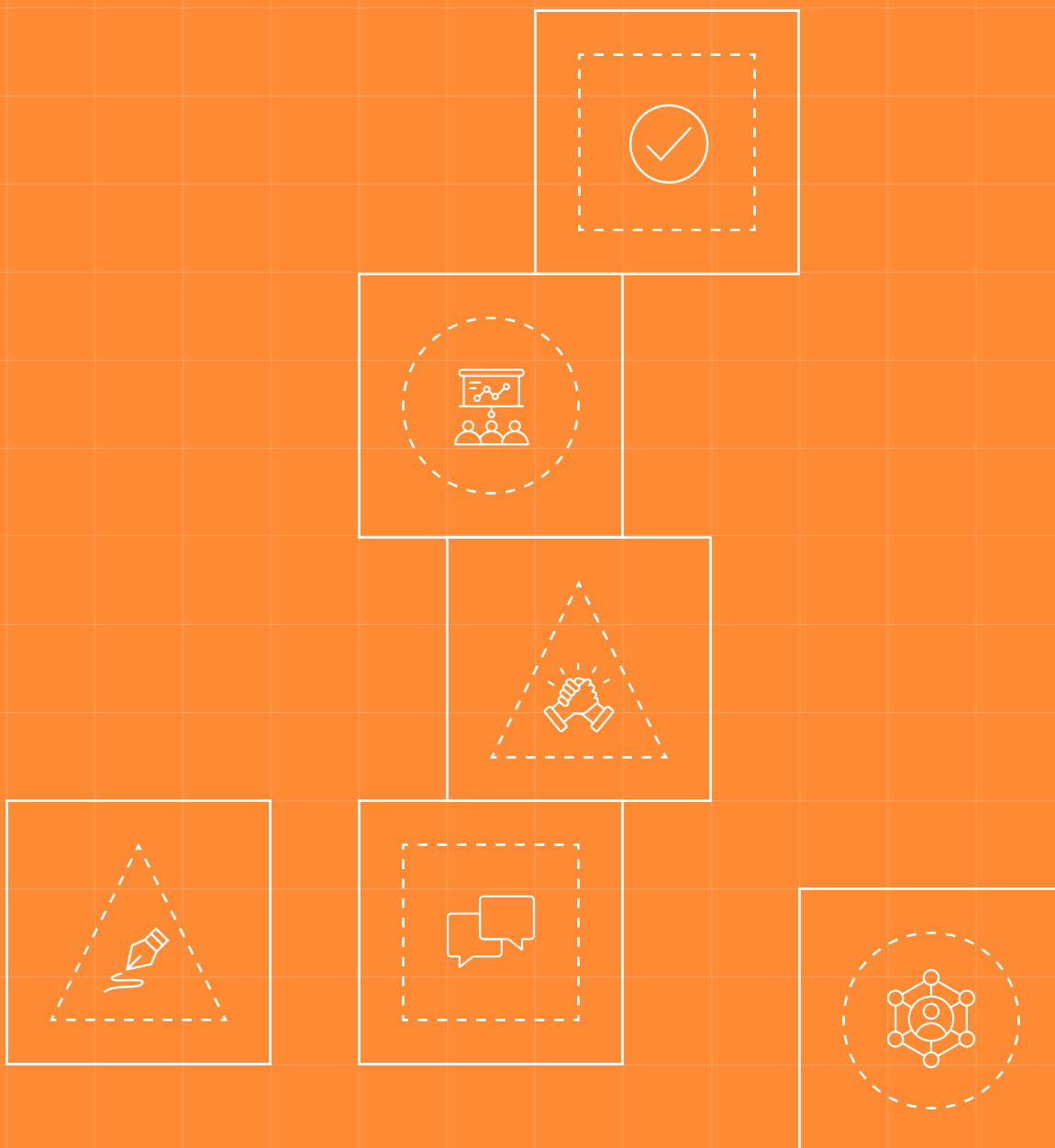


Chapter 5

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

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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.

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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.

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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.

→ **For endnotes, see the full policy guide [here](#).**

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.

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	Legislative Adoption	Executive Adoption
Opportunities		
Challenges		
Feasibility		

Ideal Strategy to Pursue	
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