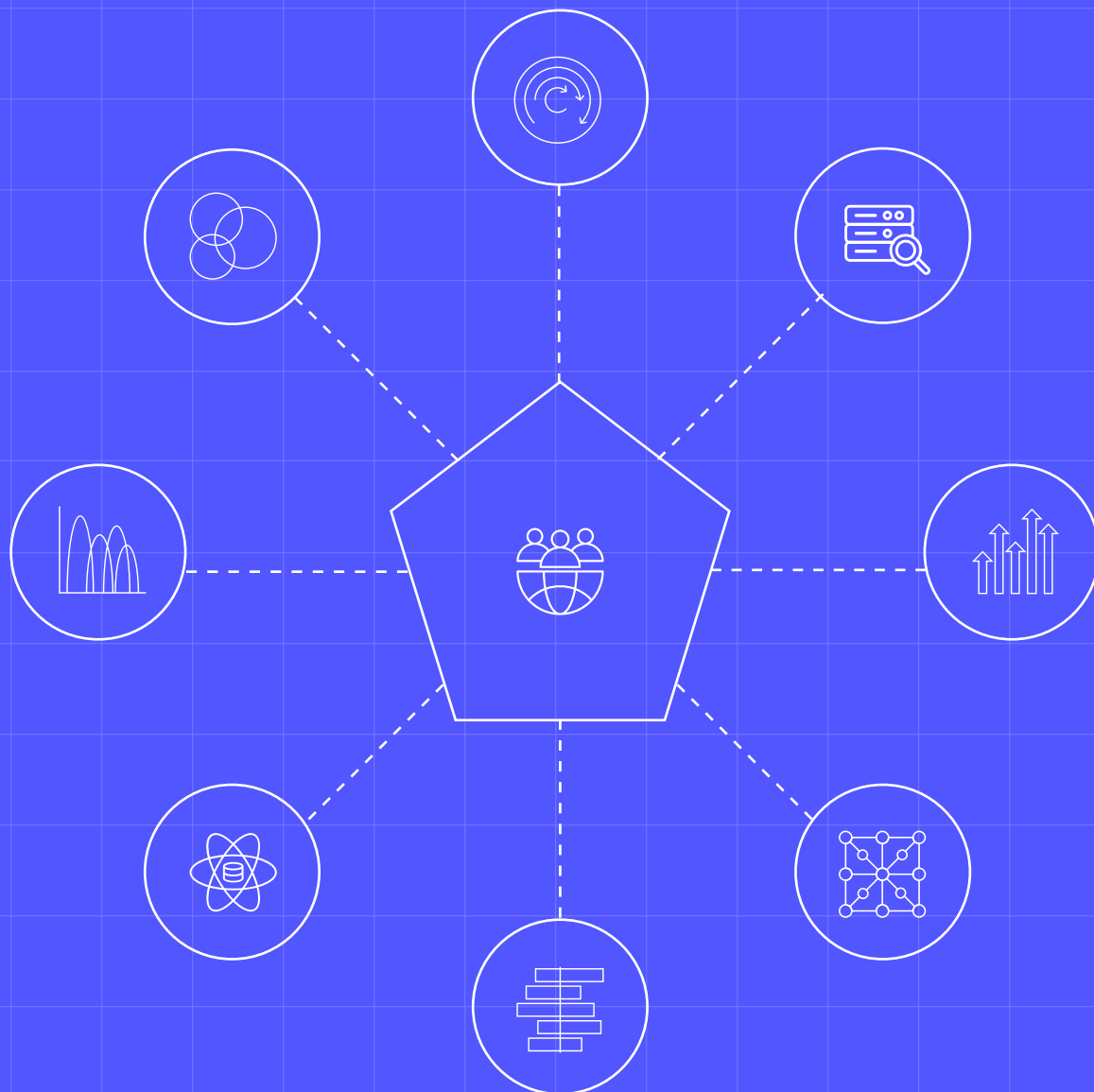**Chapter 8**

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.

→ **For endnotes, see the full policy guide here.**

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.