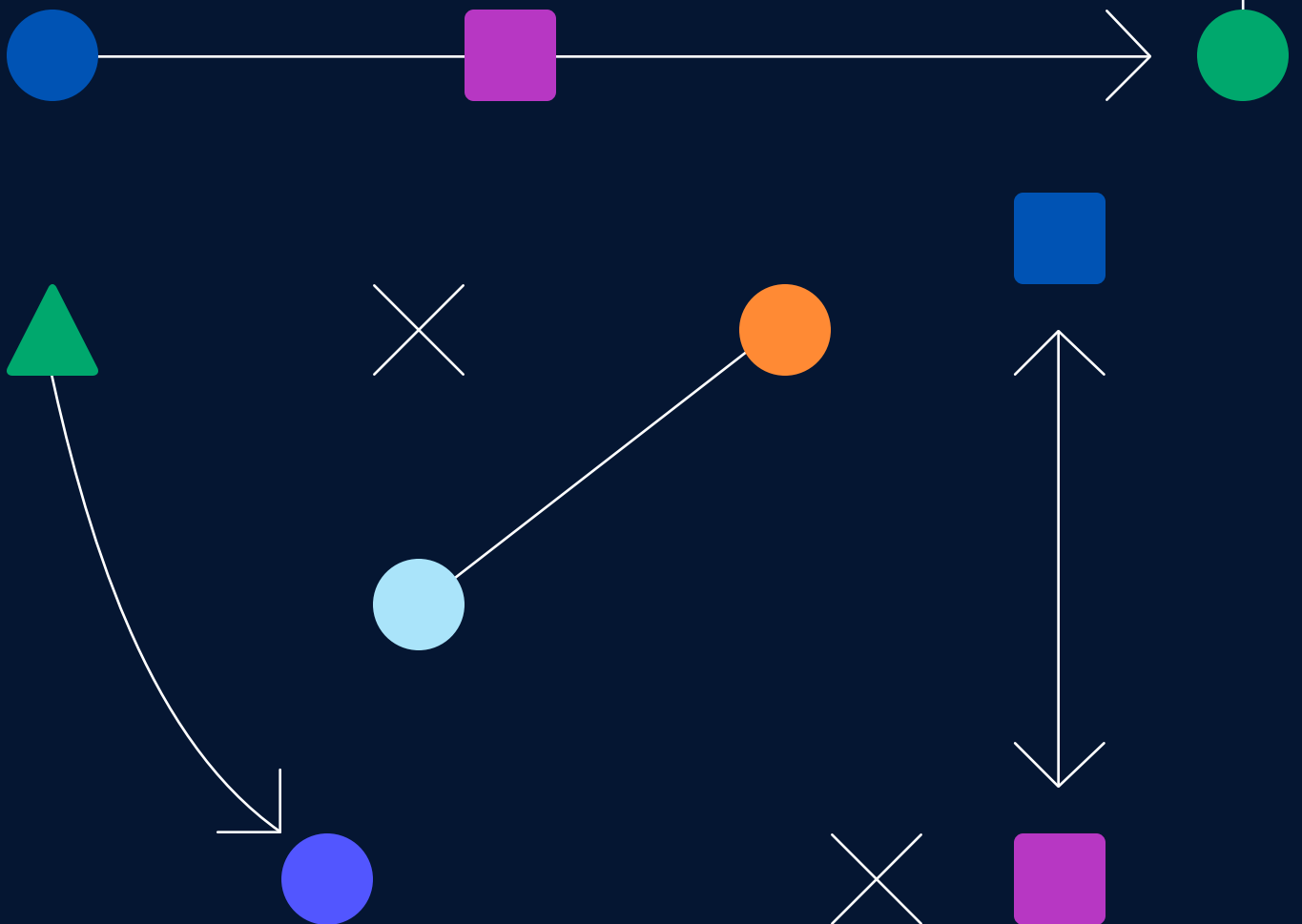# Evaluation Policy Guide

Exercise Workbook

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 in Chapter 1.)**

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.**

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.[1]

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?**

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

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?**

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?
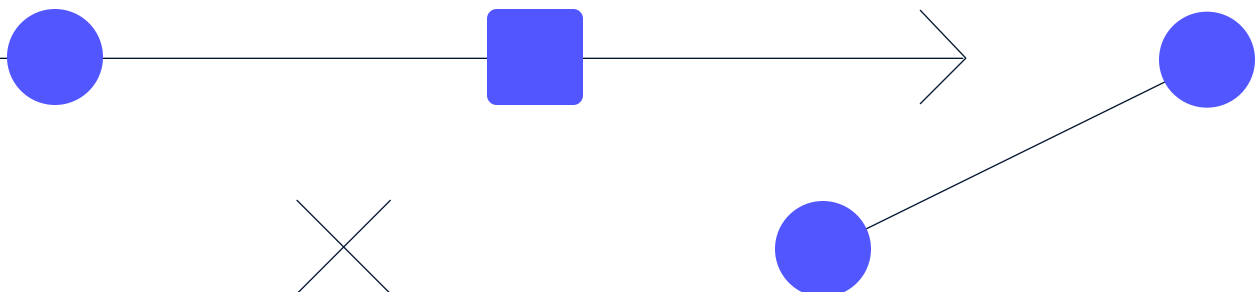
Exercise 4: Develop Your Evaluation Policy

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?

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	

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?			

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:			
	Type of Evaluation	**Research Partner**	**Equity & Validity Considerations**	**Evaluation Budget**
Evaluation Plans				
Community Engagement Plan	**Who will you engage? How, when and for what purpose?**			

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.